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EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE PROGRAMME OF THE UNITED NATIONS
HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES

Forty-fourth session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 481st MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Monday, 4 October 1993, at 10 a.m.

Temporary Chairman: Mr. LANUS (Argentina)

Chairman: Mr. BODDENS-HOSANG (Netherlands)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

OPENING OF THE SESSION (item 1 of the provisional agenda)

1. The TEMPORARY CHAIRMAN declared open the forty-fourth session of the Executive Committee.

EXPRESSION OF SYMPATHY IN CONNECTION WITH THE RECENT EARTHQUAKE IN INDIA

2. The TEMPORARY CHAIRMAN, speaking on behalf of the Bureau and all delegations, expressed sympathy to the Government of India in connection with the recent earthquake in that country.

3. At the invitation of the temporary Chairman, the members of the Executive Committee observed a minute of silence in tribute to the victims of the earthquake.

STATEMENT BY THE OUTGOING CHAIRMAN

4. The TEMPORARY CHAIRMAN, speaking as outgoing Chairman of the forty-third session, said that, over the past two years, UNHCR had had to face many new challenges and had achieved some signal successes. Its budget had been substantially increased, but the volume of refugee flows had risen still more sharply. Far from diminishing, the number of conflicts worldwide was on the increase. In the former Yugoslavia alone, more than 4 million people were now dependent on international aid; over 10 per cent of the population of Somalia and Liberia had fled beyond those countries' borders; 500,000 persons had been displaced as a result of the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan; and new problems were developing in Bhutan and Togo.

5. Against that sombre background, attention must be drawn to UNHCR's achievements, especially in Central America, Cambodia and Mozambique, where voluntary returns were taking place on an unprecedented scale. In all, some 2,430,000 persons had returned voluntarily to their home countries, largely as a result of UNHCR's efforts.

6. He paid a special tribute to UNHCR officials at all levels for their selfless devotion and commitment to the organization's humanitarian ideals. He also commended the non-governmental organizations and their many volunteer field workers, and, of course, the donor countries, whose continuing support and solidarity deserved particular thanks. In conclusion, he expressed high esteem for the High Commissioner, whose work enjoyed the confidence and appreciation of all delegations.

ELECTION OF OFFICERS (item 2 of the provisional agenda)

7. The TEMPORARY CHAIRMAN invited the members of the Committee to nominate candidates for the office of Chairman.

8. Mr. REYN (Belgium) nominated Mr. Boddens-Hosang (Netherlands).

9. Mr. TEJ BUNNAG (Thailand) and Mr. BENHIMA (Morocco) seconded the nomination.

10. Mr. Boddens-Hosang (Netherlands) was elected Chairman by acclamation.

11. The TEMPORARY CHAIRMAN invited the members of the Committee to nominate candidates for the office of Vice-Chairman.

12. Mr. JIN Yongjian (China) nominated Mr. Kamal (Pakistan).

13. Mr. MTANGO (Tanzania) and Mr. VAERNO (Norway) seconded the nomination.

14. Mr. Kamal was elected Vice-Chairman by acclamation.

15. The TEMPORARY CHAIRMAN invited the members of the Committee to nominate candidates for the office of Rapporteur.

16. Mr. KASTBERG (Sweden) nominated Mr. Miranda (Nicaragua).

17. Mr. PAZ (Argentina) seconded the nomination.

18. Mr. Miranda (Nicaragua) was elected Rapporteur by acclamation.

19. Mr. Boddens-Hosang (Netherlands) took the Chair.

STATEMENT BY THE CHAIRMAN

20. The CHAIRMAN said that, as the lead agency in providing assistance to civilian victims of war, UNHCR had had to take on a task for which it had not been designed in 1950. Under the able guidance of the High Commissioner, however, the Office had shown itself to be not only capable of undertaking the additional task of trying to reach people in distress and need, but also flexible enough to adjust constantly to changing circumstances, often of a highly dangerous nature. Everyone present shared in the grief over lives lost in that effort. A special tribute was due to all those working in very difficult circumstances in various parts of the former Yugoslavia.

21. The past year had brought UNHCR moments of hope as well as of anxiety and concern. Hope and satisfaction were justified when a durable solution was found for refugees who could return safely to their country of origin, as was the case in Cambodia, Burundi, Ethiopia, northwest Somalia and South Africa. A similar situation seemed to have existed in Namibia, but only for a short period of time. It was to be hoped that Mozambique and Haiti would soon join the list of countries to which refugees could return in safety and dignity. On the other hand, great concern was aroused when new conflicts broke out or old ones were renewed, sometimes in a different form, as in Afghanistan, and UNHCR was called upon to provide humanitarian assistance and protection to refugees. Almost 19 million refugees now depended on UNHCR for assistance and the figure had a tendency to increase rather than decrease over the years.

22. An even larger number of internally displaced persons - approximately 24 million - also sought humanitarian assistance, protection and a solution to their problems, but were not covered by the 1951 Convention

relating to the Status of Refugees or the 1967 Protocol. As the High Commissioner explained in her note on international protection (A/AC.96/815, para. 48), the legal bases for UNHCR programmes on behalf of people within their own country were qualitatively different from those governing work on behalf of refugees in countries of asylum, and the particular activities undertaken therefore had to vary depending on the situation of the internally displaced. In view of the large number of such persons - a figure that also tended to increase rather than decrease - the time had come to reflect on ways and means of enabling the High Commissioner to provide assistance where called upon, bearing in mind the criteria mentioned in her report and particularly the condition that UNHCR's primary role of protection and assistance to refugees should not be jeopardized. He hoped that the general debate in the Executive Committee, as well as further discussions in the Subcommittee on Protection, would provide new ideas on that issue. It would also be seen from the Note on International Protection that the High Commissioner welcomed further refinement of the basic operational criteria for involvement in situations of internal displacement within the already existing baseline criteria and the legal mandate of UNHCR. She also underlined the importance of the need for a specific request from the Secretary-General or a competent principal organ of the United Nations and the consent of the State concerned, as well as the provision of sufficient resources for the activities in question. Those were legitimate concerns which deserved a response from the Executive Committee and, if necessary, from the General Assembly.

23. The strategy of prevention, preparedness and emergency response, as well as of preparing for solutions, which the High Commissioner was mandated to follow and which she was promoting with success, could succeed only with the assistance of Governments and intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations. No one could say which aspect of UNHCR's work was more important than the others, although everyone recognized that the best solution would be not to have refugees at all. Governments and individuals could do a great deal to prevent the occurrence of refugee exoduses by removing or mitigating the main causes of conflicts and human rights abuses. That was not the task of the High Commissioner, who could only help to promote and support the international community's efforts to that end. In that respect, all Governments and organizations represented in the Committee could help to alleviate, at least in part, the High Commissioner's heavy task.

24. Another way in which the international community could help the High Commissioner was in making possible the safe and dignified return of refugees as fully fledged members of the national community. It could also help by strictly adhering to the principles of international law, including the principle of non-refoulement, and by providing the High Commissioner with the necessary human and financial resources. Who would have thought, some years previously, when UNHCR had been in serious financial difficulties, that only four years later a figure of over US$ 1 billion would be at stake? Still more was needed. Refugee situations, as well as refugee-like circumstances, preparedness, protection, prevention, return, emergency and humanitarian assistance, could be sustained only if all countries in a position to do so provided the necessary assistance.

25. Behind all those facets of policy, planning, programming and financing, it should not be forgotten that what was being discussed was the human factor of the refugee. People in need, in distress, under threat, homeless, exposed to the volatility of nature and climate, abused at times, hungry and often without hope for a better future in their own country were involved. Article 3 of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights stated that "Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person", but not everyone in the world was yet in a position to exercise that right. The Executive Committee had collectively to help UNHCR in providing assistance to "those unhappy people who are persecuted by fate, but did not by themselves commit any crime", in the words of Hugo Grotius. The members of the Executive Committee should work together in such a way that those people realized that the Executive Committee cared for them, in one form or another.

ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA AND OTHER ORGANIZATIONAL MATTERS (Item 3 of the provisional agenda)(A/AC.96/XLIV/L.1)

26. The provisional agenda (A/AC.96/XLIV/L.1) was adopted.

GENERAL DEBATE (agenda item 4)

27. Mrs. OGATA (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees), after welcoming all those present, said that it was encouraging to see an ever-growing number of non-governmental organizations attend the Executive Committee's meetings. She thanked the outgoing Chairman and congratulated the Executive Committee's new officers, whose wisdom and guidance would be of tremendous value during the coming year. She also paid a special tribute to the many heroic staff members working in the field, particularly those who, during the past year, had risked or lost their lives while serving others. Security was, in fact, a matter of special concern to her, since UNHCR's staff and other humanitarian workers had become targets of deliberate attacks. She was grateful to the Secretary-General for his repeated calls to the international community to prosecute and punish those responsible.

28. She had just returned from a journey to Iran, Pakistan and Afghanistan. She had visited two of the most generous asylum countries, which together had hosted more than 6 million Afghan refugees for over a decade. Fortunately, the region concerned was experiencing repatriation on an enormous scale; however, the hope for a lasting solution depended greatly on the improvement of conditions inside Afghanistan. Moreover, there were fears of new outflows, since instability and internal displacement characterized some of the countries bordering the region. The journey had highlighted many important issues, such as the challenge of solutions, prevention and presence, protection and asylum, and the need for resources.

29. Those issues should be viewed from the perspective of a humanitarian organization operating in a world which was still groping for a new order. The major challenges confronting the United Nations at the moment - on the one hand, that of maintaining peace and security and, on the other, that of promoting economic and social development - were both directly relevant to the humanitarian work of UNHCR, whose close collaboration with United Nations political initiatives was essential in order for it to be able to solve refugee problems and its close coordination with United Nations development

activities critical to ensure the viability of those solutions. Humanitarian assistance could make an important contribution to peace-keeping and peacemaking, but, as the situation in the former Yugoslavia so clearly demonstrated, humanitarian endeavours could not replace peace settlements or become a substitute for political negotiations.

30. That was the background to the issue of solutions to refugee problems. In Iran, she had seen long convoys of buses with Afghan refugees moving homewards to a country where security was fragile and economic prospects dim. Since the inception of the programme, some 2.5 million Afghan refugees had gone home, 1.9 million of them with the assistance of UNHCR. While the numbers were impressive, the reintegration possibilities were a source of concern. Lack of funds was severely inhibiting the continuation of UNHCR's repatriation activities, particularly in Iran, as well as the United Nations humanitarian assistance operation inside Afghanistan.

31. At the Executive Committee's session in 1991, she had predicted the beginning of a decade of voluntary repatriation. Since then, more than 3 million refugees had returned home. In the past year alone, refugees had returned to Tajikistan, Ethiopia, Somalia, Burundi, South Africa and Guatemala. Earlier in the year, UNHCR had successfully completed, in the most complex conditions, the return of more than 370,000 refugees to Cambodia. Preparations for return to Mozambique were now complete. The first organized movements from Zimbabwe had already taken place, to be followed later in the current month by those from Swaziland and Zambia. Meanwhile, more than 350,000 Mozambicans had returned spontaneously, mainly from Malawi. In that context, she was encouraged by the recent signing of an agreement with the Government of South Africa which would give UNHCR access to Mozambican refugees in that country.

32. During her visit to Bangladesh in May 1993, she had signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Government on UNHCR's role in the voluntary repatriation of refugees from Myanmar. Following her private visit to Myanmar and a recent programming mission to the area, she was hopeful that a memorandum of understanding between the Government of Myanmar and UNHCR would be completed soon and would pave the way for the safe and voluntary return of the refugees in Bangladesh.

33. She was, however, disappointed that no solutions had so far materialized for the Bhutanese refugees in Nepal and reiterated UNHCR's offer to assist the Governments concerned in that respect. Nor had there been much progress on repatriation to Eritrea and other parts of the Horn of Africa. She called on the Governments concerned to create the opportunities which would allow the refugees to exercise the right to return to their own country.

34. The desirability, feasibility and necessity of voluntary repatriation as a solution were evident, but so were its fragility, complexity and, at times, elusiveness. Often, refugees were returning to conditions of civil strife or instability, to situations where peace negotiations were still under way or not yet consolidated and to areas where infrastructure had been destroyed. Too many of UNHCR's repatriation operations were under-funded. Too little investment was made in post-conflict rehabilitation and reconstruction efforts. Political settlement and economic rehabilitation were closely

linked. The international community must show greater willingness to support politically and financially what was not only the best solution to a refugee problem, but also an investment in regional and global stability.

35. If repatriation and reintegration were well planned in coordination with other United Nations agencies, they could lay the foundations for longer-term development. It should not be pretended that UNHCR's "quick-impact projects" were anything other than a modest, practical tool to assist reintegration by focusing on community needs. Yet that "bottom-up" approach might be a critical first step on the much quoted continuum from relief to development. Having successfully moved from Central America to Cambodia, "quick-impact projects" were now spreading to other operations throughout the world.

36. As refugees went home, so must UNHCR. After 14 years, its office in Nicaragua had been phased down and would be closed at the end of 1993, after the successful completion of 350 projects to promote the reintegration of returnees. Most of UNHCR's staff on the Cambodia operation had already been redeployed. On 30 September 1993, UNHCR's office in Suriname had been closed down.

37. With repatriation opportunities increasing, there was a need to examine the role of resettlement as a solution, particularly to meet protection needs. She invited interested Governments to hold further consultations with UNHCR on that subject.

38. As structures broke down, as central authority was challenged and as borders changed, an international presence in the country of origin was becoming an essential feature of UNHCR's preventive strategy. Through an international humanitarian presence, some measure of confidence, security and relief could be provided to victims of conflict or human rights violations who might otherwise feel compelled to cross borders or be unable to return home. In that sense, there was a close connection between presence, prevention and the pursuit of solutions.

39. While she had been in Iran, dramatic developments in neighbouring Azerbaijan had brought to the forefront the protection and assistance of the internally displaced as an important means of preventing refugee flows. UNHCR was extending protection and emergency assistance to some 210,000 persons in Azerbaijan who had been displaced by the recent fighting. The assistance from UNHCR's office in Baku was being augmented with cross-border support from its operation in Iran. She had decided on that parallel approach after receiving assurances from the Iranian Government that the borders would remain open for those who wished to seek asylum. She had alerted the Secretary-General to the situation, seeking his support to mobilize the political will to resolve the problem before it exploded into an even greater crisis.

40. Although she was heartened by the General Assembly's endorsement of UNHCR's activities on behalf of the internally displaced, she wished to make it clear that UNHCR was not seeking a global mandate to assist such persons. It was, however, prepared, at the request of the Secretary-General, to intervene on behalf of the internally displaced when its involvement could

have a preventive impact on refugee problems. For example, it could provide protection or assistance to displaced people who might otherwise feel compelled to become refugees.

41. Obviously, UNHCR's activities on behalf of the internally displaced must be premised on the necessary funds being available from the international community and on the consent of the country concerned. Where internal displacement posed a humanitarian problem, but there was no link to actual or potential refugee flows, UNHCR's role could be only a limited one, supporting the efforts of other organizations at the request of the Secretary-General.

42. UNHCR's contribution in the field of prevention was primarily catalytic and collaborative. As its efforts in Tajikistan and other parts of the former Soviet Union demonstrated, prevention could work only if it was part of a larger international effort to resolve the underlying causes of conflict and to ensure respect for human rights. Indeed, she could not adequately emphasize the need for an integrated and comprehensive approach by the United Nations system in that part of the world if the proliferation of humanitarian crises was to be contained. Prevention, like solutions, was cost-effective in the long term, but cost-intensive in the short term, often requiring considerable investment, particularly in terms of staffing to ensure presence. The international community was expected to respond more speedily and generously to support those efforts.

43. Prevention must be pursued not as an alternative to asylum, but in addition to it. The possibility of asylum must continue to remain open for those who sought it. While she was encouraged by the developments to provide temporary protection in situations of large-scale movements, she was also concerned by the fact that major reversals could be observed in the commitment to asylum. The cardinal principle of non-refoulement was being flouted in some parts of the world by those very States which supported UNHCR's international action most generously elsewhere. As she had said in her statement to the recent International Conference for the Protection of War Victims, the human suffering of the two World Wars had led to the emergence of certain cardinal legal and moral values to protect the individual, including the right to seek and enjoy asylum. States that were tempted to curb that right should carefully consider the pervasive and unscrupulous nature of military conflict today. Everyone should remember, particularly in the industrialized world, that wars and their appalling human consequences were not so remote in history. UNHCR had wanted the right of asylum to be more widely recognized and more generously granted to those fleeing from countries that today contemplated restricting that right. At a time when Europe was once again the scene of conflict and the source of large refugee outflows, the need to protect refugees had never been greater. If there was legitimate concern about how to manage irregular migratory flows, other means must be found to solve the problem. She called on the Executive Committee to continue to support UNHCR's unique protection mandate.

44. International protection must be accompanied by rapid and effective emergency response. During the past year, UNHCR's capacity to respond to emergencies had been tested with some success in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Afghanistan, Tajikistan, Ghana, Benin, Uganda and Liberia. At the moment, it was assessing emergency needs and providing some relief material to those

recently displaced in Georgia. Its emergency operation in the former Yugoslavia had expanded enormously since it had first begun. Today, UNHCR was assisting some 2.7 million people who were displaced and besieged in Bosnia and Herzegovina, in addition to over 1.3 million Bosnian refugees in neighbouring Croatia, Serbia and Montenegro. Prolonged war lasting into a second winter, the vicious and total disregard of humanitarian norms and the consequent security threats raised serious questions as to how long a civilian operation could continue in those circumstances. The spiral of emergencies had led UNHCR to strengthen further its preparedness and response capacity through standby arrangements. A total of 123 Nordic staff had been deployed to operations in 16 countries over the past two years following arrangements with the Danish and Norwegian Refugee Councils. A similar arrangement was now in place with the United Nations Volunteers and comparable measures with other bodies were being explored. UNHCR was also strengthening its partnership agreement with the World Food Programme to ensure that, together, the two agencies were better equipped to respond to all food emergencies.

45. She was grateful to the Executive Committee for increasing the Emergency Fund to US$ 25 million and the ceiling for any single emergency to US$ 8 million. At the same time, she was concerned that many of the so-called "silent" or "invisible" emergencies were not funded or only inadequately so. All emergencies should be treated equally as a matter of life or death for the refugees. UNHCR's responsibility was global and so should be its response.

46. Enhanced accountability and better delivery of programmes were both issues to which she was deeply committed. In addition to UNHCR's now well-established Emergency Preparedness and Response Teams, her Office had created a pool of emergency administrative staff to ensure that rapid response was coupled with improved accountability. In the pursuit of better programme delivery, she had established an internal Working Group on Programme Management and Operational Capacity, whose recommendations focused on greater delegation to the field and a modified UNHCR programming cycle to allow integrated planning and enhanced monitoring and reporting. The Working Group's recommendations were now in the process of being implemented. Her ultimate goal was to create an institutional culture where effective performance, efficiency and accountability were prized objectives. That was linked not only to improved programming, but also to better human resources management. In the course of 1993, an ambitious plan of action had been developed to cover such aspects as recruitment, career planning, training and performance evaluation. Steps were being taken to strengthen the Division of Human Resources Management with the necessary technical expertise to carry out the plan.

47. She had already referred to her deep concern about the difficult and dangerous conditions to which many UNHCR staff were daily exposed. The Field Safety Coordination Unit established in January 1993 had adopted a number of specific measures to improve staff security, in close coordination with United Nations Headquarters and other agencies. A modest beginning had also been made on stress management, a small but nevertheless important recognition of a serious problem affecting those working under the most demanding conditions.

48. UNHCR's General Programmes, which benefited some 13 million of the world's 19 million refugees and supported most of its worldwide protection responsibilities, was seriously under-funded. Although needs were going up, as reflected by the Executive Committee's decision to increase the 1993 target to US$ 413 million, the contributions of a number of the most important donors would be well below the 1992 level. With the carry-over from 1992, UNHCR would probably cover its 1993 General Programmes budget. However, what was really worrying was the funding of the 1994 General Programmes and a number of Special Programmes, particularly the repatriations to Mozambique, the Horn of Africa and, possibly, Liberia. If programmes were cut back, the first to suffer would be those services which benefited refugee women and children most. She appealed strongly to as many Governments as possible to announce contributions at the Pledging Conference in New York on 10 November 1993. A generous response then and in the remaining months of the year would make the early days of 1994 less gloomy.

49. The gap was clearly growing between what UNHCR was asked to do and what it could do. As a turbulent world searched for a new equilibrium, there was no doubt that UNHCR would continue to face many demands in the next few years. Its main focus would probably remain on Africa, but it might also have to respond to new and ongoing emergencies, increasingly in areas where it had never operated before and where severe winters would require intensive measures to meet shelter and energy needs. At the same time, repatriation opportunities would continue to demand more resources. To meet that challenge, UNHCR would have to look for both internal and external improvements. Internally, it would have to improve its own performance and accountability and, externally, to work with others to enhance its capacity, maximize its resources and enlarge support for a coherent and comprehensive strategy on refugee problems. A five-point partnership lay ahead.

50. First, UNHCR must continue to work closely with the political arms of the United Nations and regional organizations to ensure that its humanitarian response was paralleled by political initiatives to resolve refugee-producing conflicts. The dangerously recurrent nature of many refugee emergencies, particularly in Africa, only underlined the strong need for the international community to make concerted and energetic efforts to pursue political solutions. With humanitarian action becoming an important component of many peace-keeping or peacemaking operations, the challenge was to ensure that the independent, non-political and impartial nature of humanitarian action was preserved, perceived as such and respected by all. UNHCR must redouble its efforts to adhere strictly to the fundamental neutral and non-political principles that had governed its policies and programmes and had given it the credibility without which it could not operate in any meaningful way.

51. Secondly, UNHCR should continue to develop its cooperation with the humanitarian organizations within and outside the United Nations system, so as to maximize comparative advantages. She looked forward to close collaboration with the Department of Humanitarian Affairs in its efforts to mobilize the system's response to complex emergencies and address the continuum from relief to development. Furthermore, as UNHCR operated increasingly in situations of conflict, it must deepen further its institutional contacts with the International Committee of the Red Cross in order to enhance complementarity. Equally, the linkages between migration and refugee flows called for the

strengthening of UNHCR's partnership with the International Organization for Migration. She attached particular importance to their joint programmes of mass information, which helped people to be informed about the opportunities and consequences of their movement before they decided to leave their homes.

52. Thirdly, NGOs were UNHCR's quickest partners in emergency response and its strongest advocates on international protection. Their community-based approach was an asset in bridging the gap between relief and development. Their ability to mobilize public support and donor assistance was critical at a time of heightened demand. The decision to award the 1993 Nansen Medal to Médecins sans Frontières was a recognition of the NGO contribution to the refugee cause. UNHCR had initiated a process of consultation with NGOs called PARINAC or Partnership in Action, which was intended to lay the basis for enhanced and improved future NGO/UNHCR collaboration. Six preparatory regional meetings were to culminate in a global conference in Oslo in June 1994.

53. Fourthly, UNHCR must further deepen its collaboration with UNDP, UNICEF and other development organizations. UNHCR was exploring partnership arrangements with the World Bank and regional banks, which had an important role to play in dealing with the economic and social causes underlying coerced movements, as well as in post-conflict reconstruction to consolidate peace agreements.

54. Lastly, she relied on the continued cooperation and support of Governments, whether of countries of origin, asylum or donors. She was deeply grateful for the unquantifiable contribution made by countries of asylum as well as to the major donors, which, despite all difficulties, had responded magnificently over the past two years. She nevertheless appealed to them once again in the strongest terms to do everything possible to maintain, as a minimum, their level of contribution to UNHCR.

55. During the past three years, she had visited 46 countries. During the same period, the number of refugees had increased from 15 to 19 million. Some 5 million refugees had returned home. UNHCR had seen its budget soar from US$ 544 million to almost US$ 1.3 billion, its staff rise from 2,400 to almost 4,000 persons. Dramatic developments had been matched by explosive growth. Looking back over the past three years and looking ahead, she was more than ever convinced that UNHCR's mission was as unique as it was gratifying. She was deeply appreciative of UNHCR's privileged partnership with member and observer States of the Executive Committee, the United Nations system and international and non-governmental organizations. Together, they must continue their pursuit of protection and solutions for the world's refugees. Their strategy must be based on partnership, their approach on solidarity. The goal must be human security for all and she committed UNHCR to that course.

56. Mr. WIRTH (United States of America) said that the changes and choices the world now faced were as demanding as any it had known since World War II, but their nature and the speed with which they proliferated were remaking the missions of governments and the agencies of the United Nations.

57. That historic transformation demanded that countries should liberate themselves from outworn policies and old assumptions which had only yesterday seemed to be the dividing and defining lines of international affairs.

58. People were on the move and were both the cause and consequence of new forces for change. Some were fleeing ethnic and political conflict, others were leaving lands that could no longer support the burgeoning population or cope with environmental degradation. A fresh approach to the circumstances of refugees, displaced persons and migrants in the world at the present time required sustained, profound and imaginative attention.

59. He stressed the need for an enlightened and aggressive international programme that focused on world population growth. The global population of 5.5. billion included hundreds of millions with little or no opportunity for self-fulfilment, education, employment or personal security. World population growth to 8, 10 or even 13 billion would bring even greater political alienation, instability and unsustainable economic development, enough to make impossible the daunting tasks faced by UNHCR and the public and private organizations that met the needs of the world's refugees and dealt with humanitarian crises.

60. His country had rejoined the crucial global population programmes, reversing 12 years of studied neglect. It looked forward to working with all countries to promote voluntary family planning, carefully coordinated with women's health, education and empowerment programmes. It believed that a crucial international priority must be the provision of family planning to everyone who wanted it.

61. The United Nations system must be strengthened in its ability to deal with human rights violators. New mechanisms, such as the establishment of a High Commissioner for Human Rights, were necessary to give the issue the attention it deserved.

62. Referring to the call by the High Commissioner for Refugees for new approaches to address coerced movements preemptively by supporting the "right to remain", he said that his country endorsed that concept, for defending an individual's right to live in safety and dignity in his own home and country of origin was the logical culmination of respect for human rights. Democratic and tolerant societies, where national minorities lived free of persecution, did not produce refugees and his country set the promotion of democratic societies and the related rule of law among its top priorities.

63. For nations devastated by war, it was necessary to forge a link from emergency assistance to sustainable development if peace and stability were to be maintained.

64. The United States was encouraged that the new Administrator of UNDP had stressed his commitment to join in the solution of humanitarian emergencies. It looked forward to UNDP using the tools of development and technical cooperation in the transition from refugee reintegration to national reconstruction.

65. Recalling that President Clinton had underlined the United States commitment to the priority of sustainable development in his recent statement to the General Assembly, he said that opportunity for all in today's world required a viable economic base, which must strive to meet the needs of the current generation without robbing from future generations.

66. Perhaps the most essential component of improved emergency response was improved coordination. His Government was pleased with the efforts made by UNHCR to solidify its cooperation with other United Nations agencies. In that regard, he referred to the outstanding examples of coordination shown by humanitarian agencies in the former Yugoslavia, Cambodia and Africa. There was still room for improvement, however, and his delegation looked to the leadership of all relevant United Nations agencies to promote a "culture of cooperation" to reduce inefficiency and close gaps in relief programmes.

67. When humanitarian assistance was carried out in concert with peace-keeping operations, the challenge of effective coordination was greatly amplified. Compassion and commitment to meeting humanitarian needs should be sufficient to prompt an examination of the lessons learned in delivering assistance in conflict zones in the former Yugoslavia, Somalia and northern Iraq. If they were not, then financial considerations alone could compel it, since billions of dollars were involved in combined peace-keeping and humanitarian operations.

68. The other critical element of improved emergency response was preparedness. Lofty goals and good intentions were no substitute for skilled personnel and accessible stockpiles of supplies. Effective, efficient partnerships with NGOs were an essential complement to the work of international organizations.

69. Referring to the need for adequate and steady funding, he recalled that the United States had urged in 1992 that the General Programme should be given increased funding and flexibility so that UNHCR could respond quickly and adequately to changing needs. He was pleased to announce that an additional unearmarked contribution of $19 million placed his Government's contribution to the 1993 UNHCR General Programme at over $91 million and its cash contribution to the combined General and Special Programmes at $184.4 million.

70. The most visible Special Programme was in the former Yugoslavia. Bosnians would soon face their second winter in conflict. UNHCR appeared to be on schedule in the procurement of winter survival materials. In view of the need to maintain delivery of those life-saving items throughout the fall, he announced a new cash pledge to UNHCR of $2.3 million for winterization needs in Bosnia; that would bring his country's overall Government effort in the former Yugoslavia to $277.6 million in 1993. He urged other members of the Executive Committee and donors to contribute in cash or in kind to provide critical supplies for winter operations.

71. Another factor in the relief equation was the protection and assistance provided to refugee women and children. The United States welcomed the progress made so far by UNHCR to integrate the needs and abilities of refugee women and the needs of refugee children and looked forward to further progress. He stressed the need to move beyond rhetoric and adopt practical

approaches. Providing for the security of women to reduce sexual violence and exploitation was essential. The medical needs of refugee women, including access to family planning and health services, must be factored into field programming. Increasing attention had to be paid to health, nutrition and education as UNHCR implemented its revised guidelines on refugee children.

72. Mr. REYN (Belgium), speaking on behalf of the European Community and its member States, said that, from the global standpoint, 1993 had clearly been a dramatic year for UNHCR, not only because of the increased number of refugees and displaced persons, but also because of increasingly obvious violations of the principles of international humanitarian law and human rights, the growing insecurity of working conditions and obstacles placed in the way of humanitarian actions for political purposes by the parties in conflict.

73. In Europe, the continued fighting and deteriorating humanitarian system in Bosnia, Herzegovina and Croatia were still a primary concern of the international community. In view of the ongoing implementation of the policy of ethnic cleansing, enforced displacements and deliberate efforts to starve the population, his delegation was seriously concerned now that winter was approaching. In that regard, he drew special attention to the tragic fate of women and children, the main victims of the conflict. He reiterated the wholehearted support of the European Community and its member States for the remarkable work being done by UNHCR in connection with its programme for the former Yugoslavia, as well as for the untiring efforts being made by the two negotiators of the International Conference on the Former Yugoslavia to bring about an equitable solution to the conflict and the rapid restoration of peace. Since the beginning of the conflict in 1991, the European Community and its member States had contributed US$ 945 million for assistance operations in the former Yugoslavia, i.e. 65 per cent of total contributions. Of that amount, UNHCR had received US$ 373 million and he assured the High Commissioner of the Community's continued support.

74. His delegation wanted to continue to be involved in the formulation of the humanitarian action strategy and drew attention to the exemplary initiative taken by UNHCR and donor countries to establish a consortium for shelter, infrastructure and energy. The consortium would not only deal with the emergency situation, but would also be involved in the reconstruction phase.

75. The humanitarian implications of the conflicts in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia were also a matter of great concern both in humanitarian terms and in terms of regional peace and security. In central Asia, the refugee situation in Tajikistan and the continuing programme for the repatriation of 1.5 million Afghans gave rise to similar concerns.

76. He drew attention to the dramatic plight of the Shiite population of southern Iraq and stressed the need to implement a programme of assistance for those refugees. He also expressed concern at the deteriorating humanitarian situation of the Kurdish population in northern Iraq.

77. With regard to repatriation programmes in Asia, he drew attention to the success of the Comprehensive Plan of Action for Indo-Chinese Refugees, including the resettlement programme launched and financed mainly by the

European Community, and to the repatriation of some 360,000 Cambodian refugees. The Community also welcomed the forthcoming implementation of an agreement on the repatriation of Rohingas refugees in Myanmar.

78. Africa continued to be hard hit by the problem of refugees and displaced persons resulting primarily from ethnic conflicts. In Somalia, the concerted action of UNOSOM and humanitarian agencies had brought about a definite improvement in the food supply situation. However, the humanitarian and policy objectives of such operations must continue to be given priority. Except in Mogadishu, relatively satisfactory conditions of security had been restored, and that had made it possible to begin reconstruction, with the implementation of Quick Impact Projects (QIPs). In that context, the Community supported the programme for the repatriation and reintegration of all refugees in conditions of security and dignity.

79. Angola, torn apart by 18 years of conflict, was also at the heart of the Community's concern. The Community was closely following the situation in southern Sudan and paying particular attention to the freedom of access and proper conduct of humanitarian operations in that region.

80. While the situation remained precarious in many other African countries, there was a glimmer of hope as a result of the recent conclusion of peace agreements in Rwanda and Eritrea that paved the way for the voluntary repatriation of refugees. The Community was in favour of efforts to speed up the ambitious repatriation and reintegration programme for 1.5 million refugees in Mozambique launched following the peace agreement signed in Rome in October 1992 and welcomed the recent breakthrough achieved in Liberia following the signature of the Cotonou agreements. It also welcomed the signature, in September 1993, of an historic agreement between South Africa and UNHCR authorizing UNHCR to exercise its mandate for the protection and assistance of all refugees in South Africa.

81. In Central America, attention should be drawn to the successful repatriation and reintegration process conducted within the framework of CIREFCA. The Community recognized that voluntary repatriation in conditions of security and dignity was the most appropriate solution for refugees and therefore welcomed UNHCR's initiative for the definition of repatriation guidelines. The repatriation of refugees should, however, be accompanied by their full reintegration into the economic and social life of their country. In the context of reconstruction, the international community should help to remove mines from former areas of conflict.

82. The Community confirmed its appreciation of regular exchanges of information organized by UNHCR through informal meetings of the Executive Committee and took note of the important work being done in the Subcommittee of the Whole on International Protection and the Subcommittee on Administrative and Financial Matters.

83. While supporting the principle of establishing an inspector's office to carry out a global evaluation of UNHCR's field activities, the Community stressed the need for a careful examination of the budgetary implications of such a decision and for the redeployment of staff resources within UNHCR. With regard to prevention and solutions, it drew attention to the possibility

that UNHCR might cooperate with the competent United Nations bodies in the human rights field, to its active involvement in the protection and assistance of displaced persons and to its protection mandate in time of conflict and in voluntary repatriation situations.

84. The Community and its member States welcomed the revision of the initial guidelines concerning refugee children. They also expressed their support in principle for the draft conclusions on the personal security of refugees and refugee protection and sexual violence. They expressed their appreciation of the work being done in the informal working group on temporary protection for nationals of the former Yugoslavia and undertook to continue that informal dialogue with UNHCR in order to harmonize to the greatest possible extent the implementation of temporary protection measures for those persons.

85. In accordance with their humanitarian tradition and the principles of the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, the member States of the European community had granted and continued to grant asylum and protection to persons who had reason to fear persecution for the reasons referred to in the Convention. They were concerned at the fact that the growing number of abusive requests for asylum in western Europe were seriously threatening refugee reception. At present, the majority of asylum-seekers were neither refugees within the meaning of the Convention nor persons authorized to remain in a particular country for other imperative reasons.

86. In order to guarantee that asylum-seekers enjoyed all their recognized rights, it was necessary to combat abusive requests, which overburdened procedures for the determination of refugee status, delayed recognition of refugees who genuinely needed protection and undermined the integrity of the institution of asylum. The member States of the Community had therefore concentrated their efforts in two directions. First, they had adopted the rules for determining responsibility for examining applications for asylum, which were embodied in the Dublin Convention of 15 June 1990 and were designed to organize the orderly handling of applications for asylum and to prevent asylum-seekers from becoming refugees in orbit. Secondly within the framework of the harmonization of asylum policies, the ministers of the member countries had met in December 1992 and had adopted two resolutions, one relating to manifestly unfounded requests for asylum and the other to third receiving countries. In any event, a distinction had to be made between persons who were genuine asylum-seekers, within the meaning of article 1 of the Convention, and economic immigrants. The process of making that distinction would not affect the situation of genuine refugees, but would enable Governments to determine their status rapidly and reliably and to provide them with the necessary protection. A solution also had to be found to the problem of refugees whose request for asylum had been denied and who were in unlawful situations, including the negotiation of agreements for their readmission. In that context, the Community countries undertook to continue their action to combat racism and xenophobia and urged the international community as a whole to do the same.

87. Noting that the traditional donor countries were experiencing difficulties in keeping pace with UNHCR's increasing financial requirements, he said that the European Community and its member countries, which were UNHCR's largest contributors, financed more than 40 per cent of the overall

budget. During the past two years, they had also contributed substantial amounts of food aid through the World Food Programme. They once again assured UNHCR of their continued support, even though they had their own budgetary problems. They drew attention to the need to ensure more burden-sharing between the small number of traditional donors and called for the financial cooperation of other wealthy States in order to cope with the considerable challenges of the future. They encouraged UNHCR to build its partnership with the other humanitarian agencies of the United Nations system, with NGOs and with the European Community, since increased cooperation would also contribute to burden-sharing.

88. In that connection, they welcomed the excellent cooperation in the field between UNHCR and ICRC and stressed the importance of the coordination role played by the Department of Humanitarian Affairs with a view to dealing appropriately and quickly with complex, large-scale emergency situations.

89. In conclusion, he said that the Community and its member States once again commended the staff of UNHCR on its courage and determination and assured it of their support.

90. Mr. KULLAVANIJAYA (Thailand) said that, for nearly half a century, UNHCR had had the daunting responsibility of providing humanitarian protection and assistance to persons in need on a global scale. His country had worked closely with UNHCR for nearly two decades in joint efforts to care for hundreds of thousands of displaced persons from neighbouring countries, guided by the principles of humanitarianism, compassion for fellow human beings, sovereignty and national security.

91. From the beginning, Thailand and other ASEAN countries had stressed that, whatever durable solution was found for Indo-Chinese refugees and displaced persons, no residual cases should be left in the countries of first asylum. At present, 45,000 Indo-Chinese refugees and displaced persons, specifically 33,000 Laotians and 12,000 Vietnamese, remained in Thailand. The only durable solution for them was voluntary repatriation. While a number of problems still existed in the implementation of the repatriation plan adopted at the fourth Thai-Lao-UNHCR Tripartite Meeting held in Laos in 1991, his Government believed that, through mutual understanding and effective tripartite coordination, the repatriation process could be further accelerated. Thailand would continue to do its utmost to implement the plan. However, there was an urgent need for financial support from UNHCR and the international community to develop the socio-economic infrastructure in Laos in order to enable it to absorb a larger number of Laotian returnees.

92. Thailand had closed Ban Vinai camp in December 1992. The Chiangkam and Na Pho camps would be closed by the end of 1993 and 1994, respectively. In view of the appalling environmental degradation caused by the presence of the refugee camps, UNHCR should provide assistance for the rehabilitation of those camp sites once they had been closed.

93. With regard to the question of the Vietnamese boat people, his Government welcomed the progress made in the implementation of the Comprehensive Plan of Action (CPA). At the same time, it was concerned about obstacles to the achievement of the objectives of the CPA. It was therefore pleased to hear

that UNHCR would convene the CPA Steering Committee at the beginning of 1994. That would provide the parties concerned with an opportunity to consider appropriate modalities for a speedy and durable solution to the problem of Indo-Chinese refugees within a specific time-frame.

94. The repatriation of Cambodian refugees and displaced persons had been the most remarkable achievement of all in the attempts to solve the Indo-Chinese refugee problem over the past decade. A total of 370,000 Cambodians had returned home in safety and dignity, thanks to cooperation and support from many bodies, particularly UNHCR and UNTAC. He expressed appreciation to all concerned for their dedicated efforts.

95. Despite the success achieved, much remained to be done because the problem of displacement did not automatically end with the return of the last group of displaced persons. The root causes of the problem must be addressed. He urged the international community, development institutions and non-governmental organizations to continue their contributions to the reconstruction and rehabilitation of Cambodia. The Thai Government was ready to cooperate with all interested parties in that humanitarian programme. It had sent two engineering battalions of the Royal Army to demine and repair the main highway routes in Cambodia.

96. The fighting going on in Cambodia was a cause of concern. Since such incidents could result in the return of Cambodians to first-asylum countries, UNHCR should maintain its presence in Cambodia for some of time in order to provide protection and assistance for Cambodians affected by any renewal of hostilities.

97. There had been some misunderstanding of late about the Thai Government's policy towards nationals of Myanmar. In September 1991, the Thai Government had decided to establish a safe area for a group of Myanmar students in order to provide them with a structured programme of humanitarian assistance and prevent them from being inadvertently deported along with other illegal immigrants from Myanmar. Representatives of interested foreign agencies and international and private organizations, including UNHCR, had been fully briefed about the safe area and given access to it and they had all agreed that that measure would provide the students with the best care and maintenance. In order to be eligible to stay in the safe area, the students had been required to register with the competent Thai authorities. To date, well over 100 Myanmar students had registered to stay in the safe area.

98. He expressed appreciation to all the parties concerned, particularly the High Commissioner and her staff, for the generous support they had given Thailand in its attempts to find a durable solution for the refugees and persons displaced from neighbouring countries. His Government requested the international community to continue to be concerned with the problem and to provide the High Commissioner with all the resources required to overcome the daunting problems, in a world in transition, of displaced persons including those who remained in Thailand and the other first-asylum countries of South-East Asia.

99. Mr. GLEN (Canada) noted that the demands placed on UNHCR over the past year had been unprecedented. His country welcomed the achievements of the High Commissioner and her staff, particularly the dedicated individuals in the field who had worked so hard and so well on behalf of refugees throughout the year. In addition to the immediate difficulties confronted daily in refugee situations around the world, UNHCR had also had to contend with the problem of marshalling sufficient resources at a time when many Governments, including his own, were facing internal budget problems. In the past year, Canada had been able to maintain, and even to increase, its contributions, but it might not be able to repeat that performance in future.

100. The High Commissioner had made her first official visit to Canada in early 1993. Her presence had served to highlight Canada's collaboration with her Office in dealing with international crises and to make the Canadian public more aware of the plight of the world's millions of refugees. The High Commissioner's visit to the monument in Ottawa to Canada's peace-keepers had been an appropriate gesture that had acknowledged one of Canada's most visible contributions to the United Nation's efforts to promote peace and security for all, including refugees.

101. Respect for human rights and the application of the principles of good governance were instrumental in preventing forced displacements of peoples and outflows of asylum-seekers. discussions in forums such as OECD, CSCE, the Council of Europe and other regional organizations, as well as in the United Nations system, should be utilized to develop comprehensive strategies for dealing with the root causes of displacement and exodus. Stable and democratically elected Governments that respected human rights and fostered economic and social progress did not give their populations reason to flee and strong civil societies were better able to resolve conflicts internally when they did arise. Sustainable development must be recognized as a vital support for strong and self-confident civil administrations.

102. With regard to protection, the situation in many parts of the world remained an intolerable affront to civilization. In the former Yugoslavia, millions of people had been displaced and thousands killed or wounded. Very real problems remained in Somalia, Liberia, Angola and many other countries, despite success stories with refugees in Indo-China and South Africa and major new hopes in the Middle East. New refugee situations were developing, for example, in Tajikistan and other areas of the former Soviet Union. The current situation in Moscow illustrated the complex interrelationship between economic development, human rights and democracy and created a political challenge that could have unforeseen consequences - not least for refugees in Russia and Eastern Europe.

103. International efforts to contain such situations had demanded vastly greater amounts of money and supplies. UNHCR's budget for 1993 would exceed US$ 1.2 billion. And yet no end to many of the world's refugee problems was in sight.

104. Through its own system for determining the status of refugees, Canada continued to seek ways to ensure that the most vulnerable refugees were treated with the greatest understanding and sensitivity. Procedural guidelines for the consideration of claims to refugee status made in Canada by

women had recently been issued by the Canadian immigration and refugee board. The guidelines called for due attention to special problems, such as persecution through sexual violence, that affected women refugees disproportionately. Canada had also taken steps to improve the assistance provided to women refugees internationally. It believed that the profile and influence of Office of the Coordinator for Refugee Women must be preserved and extended to cover all of UNHCR's activities in the field.

105. Many persons displaced from their homes could not legally qualify for international assistance as refugees because they were still located in their countries of citizenship. Yet considerations relating to national sovereignty and the practical ability of United Nations organizations to gain access to displaced persons meant that the internal displacement of populations should continue to be dealt with on the basis of case-by-case requests from the Secretary-General to the appropriate agency.

106. Comprehensive policy strategies designed to preserve and enhance the principle of the protection of refugees were currently being discussed in a wide range of international institutions, including the informal intergovernmental consultations on refugee, asylum and migration policies in Europe, North America and Australia. Having recently presided over the informal consultations, Canada thanked UNHCR and the International Organization for Migration for their support for that group over the past year.

107. Durable solutions to refugee crises could be achieved only where all parties concerned found ways to work together effectively. The Comprehensive Plan of Action for Indo-Chinese Refugees was a prime example of such cooperation. Canada had contributed greatly to resettlement efforts and counted on other countries to make similar contributions. While the Comprehensive Plan of Action could not be taken as a universal model for solving refugee problems, its essential element - that people who could go home safely should do so - was fundamental to UNHCR's activities in other parts of the world. Where return was not possible, the receiving countries should make every effort to facilitate local integration, particularly in cases where temporary asylum had become de facto permanent residence. Sometimes, however, the generosity of host and donor countries had created an unhealthy dependency, generating expectations beyond the realm of the possible. UNHCR should examine ways in which refugees could contribute to their care and maintenance while in a host country and specifically, how refugees could help to mitigate environmental damage in receiving countries.

108. All of UNHCR's operational activities must focus on practical, flexible, case-by-case coordination with partners both in and outside the United Nations system. Collaborative arrangements and clear statements of accountability among United Nations agencies were the precondition for cost-effectiveness and improved delivery of humanitarian assistance. The Department of Humanitarian Affairs had a leading role to play in emergency situations, where it could contribute the necessary resources and expertise.

109. Canada recognized the enormous burden borne by UNHCR and the real difficulties that lay ahead. The Office could depend on Canada's continuing assistance in its efforts to protect the interests of the world's refugees.

110. Mr. ENDO (Japan) said that, with the end of the cold war, the international community had been expected to seek peace and prosperity on the basis of the universal principles of freedom, democracy and respect for human rights. Japan was stupefied, however, to see that ethnic, religious and other conflicts had surfaced in many parts of the world. While solutions to those conflicts should be sought in their proper context, the international community could not shy away from coping with the resulting refugee problems and human rights abuses.

111. As the Japanese Prime Minister had stated at the forty-eighth session of the General Assembly, Japan was committed to humanitarian causes. It regarded humanitarian assistance as one of its major contributions to world affairs and had been wholeheartedly supporting the activities of one of the main actors in that field, UNHCR. Since 1991, the High Commissioner had done remarkable work, drawing on her insight and dedication to the cause. His Government intended that she should continue to discharge her responsibility as the head of the organization. He paid a tribute to the staff of UNHCR, who had responded to emergencies with a sense of compassion and commitment to alleviating the plight of the more than 18 million refugees throughout the world.

112. In the former Yugoslavia, the second winter since the outbreak of hostilities would soon set in, aggravating the population's hardships. The international community had been providing humanitarian assistance for over a year and a half, yet the need for assistance would now be even greater, with no certain prospects that the conflict would be settled. The world had also witnessed other complex and urgent humanitarian crises in areas such as the Horn of Africa and the Central Asian portion of the former Soviet Union.

113. The international humanitarian effort was undergoing a major financial and institutional crisis. The United Nations and other agencies must address such problems in a comprehensive manner. The allocation of financial resources should be determined by taking into account the needs and capabilities of the organizations concerned. There should be prompt and efficient coordination among them in order to avoid duplication of efforts and to enable humanitarian assistance to be effective. Japan welcomed the enhanced cooperation based on the revised working arrangements made between UNHCR and the World Food Programme since January 1992. It hoped that that kind of arrangement would be developed with other agencies.

114. In conflict situations such as those in the former Yugoslavia or Somalia, free access to all parts of the region was crucial to the security of the staff working there and to the effective delivery of humanitarian assistance. Convoys were now often blocked, hijacked or required to make unexpected payments, however, and humanitarian workers were targets for attack. Such actions must be strongly condemned. Since, in many cases, humanitarian activities were being carried out alongside peace-keeping operations, it had become increasingly necessary for humanitarian agencies to work in close contact with the Departments of Peace-keeping Operations and of Political Affairs, while still retaining their impartiality.

115. His country greatly appreciated the note on international protection (A/AC.96/815) and had a number of comments to make on it. UNHCR had become increasingly involved in preventive activities in countries of origin. As the note rightly pointed out, however, UNHCR's contribution must be primarily catalytic and collaborative. In conflict situations such as that in the former Yugoslavia, an appropriate division of labour with other agencies, particularly the International Committee of the Red Cross or the United Nations Centre for Human Rights, was necessary. In respect of internally displaced persons, the case for protection and assistance within a country's borders should be carefully considered. The need for such assistance must be acknowledged on a case-by-case basis, taking account of UNHCR's mandate and resources.

116. Voluntary repatriation was a most desirable solution and his country welcomed the fact that some 360,000 refugees had returned to Cambodia in early 1993. Japan hoped that large-scale repatriations in Mozambique, Afghanistan, Guatemala, Ethiopia and Somalia would be carried out in safety and dignity. To ensure that the return of refugees and displaced persons was durable, rehabilitation and reconstruction were crucial. In that respect, UNHCR's role should be a catalytic one and its activities should be transitional and complementary. Japan hoped that the Quick Impact Projects which UNHCR had undertaken in Cambodia in close cooperation with UNDP and to which the Japanese Government had contributed, would be completed successfully.

117. Eliminating root causes was undoubtedly the best way of finding solutions. The refugee problem in Africa, for example, was linked to poverty. The emergency situation there and, in particular, the influx of refugees put pressure on resources originally intended for development, destroyed basic infrastructure and weakened prospects for investment and trade. Japan was now hosting an international conference on African development to discuss the issues of relief and development extensively.

118. His delegation was pleased to note that the CPA had been making substantial progress, including in respect of voluntary repatriation. Yet over 500 Vietnamese boat people had arrived in Japan in 1993. As one of the major donors to the CPA, Japan believed that the time had come to start examining measures other than the voluntary repatriation of boat people. Japan greatly appreciated the recent private visit by the High Commissioner and the follow-up technical mission to Myanmar.

119. In 1993, UNHCR's budget had increased to US $1.27 billion, reflecting the international community's support for and expectations of UNHCR's activities. Because of the strained financial situation, however, the donors were keeping a watchful eye on UNHCR's budget. His delegation placed great emphasis on UNHCR's efficiency, transparency and accountability. It greatly appreciated the High Commissioner's belief that UNHCR must maintain high moral and professional standards. Japan supported the High Commissioner's proposal for the establishment of an inspectorate as a way of gaining a comprehensive assessment of UNHCR's performance and also supported her efforts to set up a working group on programme management and operational capacity.

120. Japan pledged an additional contribution of US$ 20 million to support UNHCR's programmes, including those in Africa and the CPA. It would also continue to support the activities of the Coordinator on environmental issues.

121. Mr. JIN Yongjian (China) said that, with the alleviation of tension and the political settlement of some hot-spots, some refugee issues had been resolved gradually over the past year. Yet the global refugee situation continued to deteriorate. Solving existing refugee problems and preventing new ones had become a real challenge to the international community. China supported the efforts made by UNHCR and other United Nations bodies, in accordance with their respective mandates, to contribute to coordinated endeavours to reach a rapid solution to refugee problems.

122. The High Commissioner had pointed out that, while humanitarian assistance helped to alleviate tension and facilitated reconciliation, it could not replace political settlement, and that humanitarian assistance should be linked with long-term development. China shared those views. Peace and development were preconditions for eliminating the root causes of refugee problems and guaranteeing their comprehensive settlement. Only when sustainable development had been achieved in a peaceful environment could people live in contentment and prosperity.

123. The Chinese Government was willing to join the efforts of the international community to promote world peace and development. Regional hot-spots, armed aggression, civil strife, poverty, economic underdevelopment and natural disasters were the major sources of many refugee flows. It was imperative to prevent ethnic conflicts, stop foreign aggression and occupation, settle disputes peacefully, respect State sovereignty and make concerted efforts to achieve regional and global peace and stability. International cooperation should be strengthened with a view to promoting the economic development of developing countries, alleviating their burdens and establishing a new economic order based on equality and mutual benefit. Only by such efforts would it be possible to prevent new waves of refugees.

124. A solution to the refugee problem was the shared duty of the international community and therefore called for coordinated actions by countries of asylum, origin and settlement, as well as donor countries. In view of the deteriorating situation of refugees worldwide, the international community should redouble its efforts. Refugees should be enabled to return to their homelands in safety and dignity, through negotiations between the countries concerned, in cooperation with UNHCR.

125. At present, the developing countries sheltered the overwhelming majority of refugees worldwide. They had shouldered a heavy economic burden that affected their economic development and social stability. As one of the settlement countries for Indo-Chinese refugees, China expressed appreciation for the sacrifices made by other countries in granting asylum and accommodation to large numbers of refugees. It was to be hoped that such efforts would be appreciated by the international community and that existing refugee problems would not be ignored in the face of emerging new ones. Attention should continue to be given to refugee problems in Asia, Africa and Latin America and continued assistance was also required.

126. China acknowledged the need to enhance the ability of the international community to respond rapidly to emergencies, but it also held the view that UNHCR's non-political and humanitarian objectives had special significance and guaranteed the smooth progress of its activities. His Government hoped that UNHCR would uphold that principle in its efforts to establish a quick response mechanism. In providing humanitarian protection and assistance, UNHCR should follow the principle of respecting State sovereignty and should abide by the purposes and principles of the United Nations Charter.

127. There were nearly 300,000 Indo-Chinese refugees in China and the Chinese Government had made a great investment in terms of manpower, resources and funding to facilitate their resettlement. By the end of 1992, the special assistance package allocated by the central Government alone had totalled $730 million, not counting inputs by local authorities. The Government also provided a special pension for refugees, amounting to approximately US$ 4.5 million annually. By the end of 1992, it had implemented over 400 projects, with US$ 83 million from United Nations donations. Assistance from UNHCR had played an important role in alleviating the difficulties facing Indo-Chinese refugees in China and was greatly appreciated.

128. Half of those refugees were now able to make their living, thanks to the joint efforts of the Chinese Government and UNHCR. Yet the other half was not yet fully self-sufficient. About 20 per cent of the refugees had an annual income below the poverty line and relied heavily on assistance from the Chinese Government. They faced difficulties such as lack of education and working skills and the shortage of jobs and educational and medical facilities and there was an urgent need to improve basic living conditions, including access to shelter and drinking water.

129. In the past year, the Chinese and Laotian Governments had cooperated in the repatriation of Laotian refugees in China with the assistance of UNHCR. The satisfactory outcome of that joint effort was a successful example of how refugee problems could be solved.

130. UNHCR had made tremendous steps in assisting refugees worldwide. Its role would become even more important in future, in view of the deterioration of the refugee situation. China would continue to cooperate with the international community and UNHCR with a view to contributing to the solution of refugee problems.

The meeting rose at 12.55 p.m.

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HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES

Forty-fourth session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 482nd MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Monday, 4 October 1993, at 3 p.m.

Chairman: Mr. BODDENS-HOSANG (Netherlands)

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General debate (continued)

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GE.93-02701 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

GENERAL DEBATE (agenda item 4) (continued) (A/AC.96/813, 814 and 815)

1. Ms. WENSLEY (Australia) said that, each year, the Executive Committee's session provided an opportunity to review the operations of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees during the past 12 months, to survey current and prospective world refugee needs, to establish parameters for fund-raising and expenditure and to provide the High Commissioner with advice on priorities and strategies for action. She thanked Mrs. Ogata for the comprehensive report she had submitted to the Executive Committee at its 481st meeting and expressed her appreciation of the exceptional leadership qualities the High Commissioner had shown during the past three years. She also thanked the former Deputy High Commissioner, Mr. Stafford, whose commitment and energy would never be forgotten. She was pleased that Mr. Walzer had agreed to assume that function on a temporary basis until a permanent replacement could be appointed.

2. She paid a tribute to the UNHCR staff members who had lost their lives in the cause of humanitarian relief. Australia extended its deepest sympathy to their families and condemned once again all attacks or threats against persons involved in humanitarian protection or relief activities. No effort should be spared to ensure their protection.

3. In her overview of UNHCR activities for 1992-1993 (A/AC.96/813), the High Commissioner described an unprecedented number of new, concurrent refugee emergencies around the globe. Her Office also continued to seek durable solutions for long-standing problems. The Australian delegation noted in particular that progress had been made in the implementation of each of the components of the High Commissioner's strategic plan for UNHCR, namely, the capacity for emergency response, preventive protection and voluntary repatriation.

4. Three areas of activity deserved special mention for the results achieved. First, more than 360,000 Cambodians had returned to their country and participated in United Nations supported national elections, thereby playing a role in the reconstruction of Cambodia. The unprecedented success of that complex operation had been achieved through effective planning, broad-based international support and commitment and trust on the part of the majority of the Cambodian people. Secondly, the implementation of the Comprehensive Plan of Action for Indo-Chinese Refugees (CPA) had resulted in a dramatic decrease in the number of asylum-seekers from that part of the world. In that instance as well, international consultation and cooperation had created the conditions necessary for the success of the Plan. The third area deserving particular mention was the former Yugoslavia. In that case, UNHCR was endeavouring, in particularly difficult circumstances, to attain the objectives of prevention and protection largely through the maintenance of emergency supply lines. The fact that the political process had not succeeded so far in resolving that terrible conflict did not in any way minimize UNHCR's achievement. The looming tragedy of another winter would place even more pressure on the High Commissioner and her Office.

5. Australia unreservedly supported the comprehensive approach UNHCR had adopted towards humanitarian crises, but stressed the need to maintain at all times a clear sense of priorities. In its opinion, three areas merited careful attention. The first was the need for UNHCR to maintain effective financial and administrative systems and structures to manage a level of expenditure which consistently exceeded $1 billion. Her delegation advocated ongoing efforts to ensure increased transparency, greater accountability and timeliness of reporting.

6. The second priority involved the concept of prevention with its strong emphasis on solutions close to the source of crisis situations which threatened population displacement. It would be necessary to indicate more clearly the linkages or differences between prevention and related concepts such as humanitarian relief, peacemaking and peace-keeping. In that regard, she drew attention to the study recently submitted to the General Assembly by the Australian Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, entitled "Cooperating for peace", which offered practical suggestions for the development of preventive strategies. Clearly, no single agency was capable of dealing by itself with that vast programme of action and it was therefore of crucial importance to establish clear markers for UNHCR's areas of activity and competence and to enhance coordination with other United Nations agencies. The High Commissioner had given some important examples in that regard at the Executive Committee's preceding meeting. In that connection, Australia attached particular importance to a closer partnership between UNHCR and the Department of Humanitarian Affairs.

7. The third area requiring attention related to UNHCR's traditional mandate of protection. While supporting the application of solutions at or close to the source of humanitarian crises, Australia considered that that in no way negated the right to seek and to enjoy asylum.

8. Mass and irregular migration movements would no doubt be one of the great issues at the end of the current century and the beginning of the next century. While those movements were based largely on social and economic factors, they were also exploited by extensive people-smuggling networks. The phenomenon of mass and irregular migration was made more difficult for Governments to deal with because of its frequently close association with refugee movements. That was a development which threatened the institution of asylum itself and would in the end be to the detriment of genuine refugees. To cope with that situation, UNHCR called on Governments to adopt rapid and equitable procedures for determining the status of refugees and to provide procedures for independent review in the case of a negative decision. Australia had taken account of those two suggestions, but considered that the adoption of a multilateral approach would assume increasing importance. Its view was that a comprehensive burden-sharing approach should be adopted and that a greater number of countries should propose asylum places to those in need, wherever that might be in the world, rather than simply maintaining domestic asylum systems for those best able to reach them. That would lighten the burden for countries of first asylum.

9. At the 481st meeting of the Executive Committee, the representative of Thailand had referred to UNHCR as a vital organization. UNHCR was vital in every sense of the word: it needed vitality in order to continue to respond

to the demands placed on it. Its effectiveness was vital to the United Nations, which was struggling to cope with an explosion, as the High Commissioner had said, of humanitarian emergencies. UNHCR was vital to Governments, which were turning increasingly to it as an organization capable of responding promptly with pragmatism and compassion to urgent demands. It was vital to NGOs, which sought an ever closer partnership between Governments and communities. Lastly, it was vital to the refugees and displaced persons it had been created to serve.

10. The High Commissioner could continue to function only with the increased cooperation and support of the international community. Australia, for its part, would do everything in its power to provide that support and to secure that cooperation.

11. Mr. HALLERBY (Sweden), referring to an article entitled "Who defends the United Nations?" published the previous week in a Swedish paper, said that he wished to focus on the challenges to the United Nations system as a whole and its implications for UNHCR. Indeed, demand for the Office to be present around the world had increased steadily and operations were becoming more and more complex and difficult to carry out. Of course, the United Nations and its many programmes and specialized agencies were doing impressive work in difficult conditions. However, fundamental reforms were essential to promote coordination and efficiency.

12. There was a great risk that emergency response and humanitarian programmes would make States forget that humanitarian assistance could only be complementary to political initiatives that sought to address the root causes. Humanitarian efforts must always be guided exclusively by humanitarian needs: partisan political objectives should never be allowed to interfere with the impartiality of humanitarian assistance. The High Commissioner had met the highest expectations and was therefore to be commended. However, it was important, after such a rapid expansion, to pay attention to questions such as the streamlining of UNHCR and the development of management skills.

13. Situations involving internal displacement accounted for an increasing part of the world's forced movements of people. It was not easy to distinguish between refugees, internally displaced persons and the local population in areas of conflict or return. To treat people differently who suffered in the same circumstances would be morally questionable. His country shared the views expressed in the Note on International Protection (A/AC.96/815), but would like to go one step further in defining responsibilities. First, the State was responsible for the protection of the basic human rights of its population. Secondly, the United Nations as a whole - and not only the High Commissioner - had a responsibility to manage the problems created by the movements of people. Thirdly, the international community had a responsibility to find the necessary financial means.

14. To deal with the problem of internal displacement, the first step would be to establish a focal point in the United Nations system for information on displaced persons. That had been suggested by Sweden in the Commission on Human Rights in February 1993 and again by the European Communities at the

summer session of the Economic and Social Council. The Executive Committee should encourage the High Commissioner to study the cost of establishing such a service.

15. Questions of protection in situations of conflict and UNHCR's presence in the country of origin could not be separated from the problem of internal displacement. His delegation therefore welcomed the highly flexible and pragmatic approach adopted in the Note on International Protection. Protection and humanitarian assistance were two sides of the same coin. Humanitarian assistance, so useful to curb the most serious human rights violations, must be combined with efforts aimed at resolving the underlying conflicts.

16. The Sub-Committee on Administrative and Financial Matters should review the budgetary and programmatic implications of a limited UNHCR response to internal displacement and to the consequences for UNHCR and its staff when they worked in conflict areas. The Executive Committee might recommend that those issues should be raised at an inter-sessional meeting of the Sub-Committee.

17. His delegation saw a need at the present time to coordinate the policies and activities of development assistance programmes and of migration. It was essential to develop the necessary instruments for integrated solutions, including prevention, promotion of economic progress, democracy and human rights. It was also necessary to deal with the results of forced migration and massive refugee outflows. New thinking was necessary: conservatism was no longer appropriate.

18. Voluntary repatriation was, if sustainable, the best solution to any refugee problem. Peace and confidence-building measures were the basis for durable solutions. However, they must be combined with humanitarian and development assistance activities so that the returnees would really have a chance to start a new life. The International Conference on Central American Refugees (CIREFCA) was an example of a regional inter-agency approach that had proved to be successful. That type of experience should be developed. The Department of Humanitarian Affairs and the Inter-Agency Standing Committee had a particular responsibility in that regard. Sweden stressed that the conclusions which had been the subject of an agreement in the Economic and Social Council in the summer of 1993 had underlined the importance of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee on Emergencies. All United Nations bodies concerned should do their utmost to ensure that that Committee was an effective structure for inter-agency coordination and programming.

19. When a refugee situation occurred, the initial solution should be regional. The basic principle must be protection in the region, assistance to the refugees and the host countries and return when the cause of their flight had ceased to exist. That principle must be upheld. In the interest of the refugees, irregular migration from countries in the region where protection was already secured should as far as possible be curbed. Such movements overloaded asylum procedures and constituted a threat to the very institution of asylum. Resettlement should be used only in emergencies and special cases where no other solution was possible. It would then take the form of a temporary stay or permanent residence according to the national legislation of

the resettlement countries. The High Commissioner's requirements for the resettlement of refugees varied and resources must therefore be used in a more flexible manner. Earmarked resources for the standing quota of programmes of some countries, such as Sweden, could be used in cooperation with UNHCR to finance resettlement in those countries or for other needs. It was also of the utmost importance that all countries which had the means to do so should agree on a commitment to participate in emergency resettlement operations and that they should provide support, financially or otherwise, for the countries receiving massive refugee populations.

20. Sweden was one of the largest donors to UNHCR in general and to the UNHCR programme for the former Yugoslavia in particular. It had received a large proportion of refugees from that country. It would certainly continue to assume its share of responsibilities, but it was important for all countries to do the same. Furthermore, the magnitude of the conflict which had torn apart a European country demonstrated Europe's lack of preparedness and incapacity to act when conflicts arose in its own continent. New mechanisms to complement the 1951 Convention therefore had to be developed. A fair burden-sharing system must be an integral part of such mechanisms. With regard to the political framework of such initiatives, Sweden believed that the structure of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) would be the most suitable.

21. The world needed a strong UNHCR within a strong United Nations, characterized by flexibility, efficiency and professional management. That was the United Nations which Sweden would like to defend.

22. Mr. MOSAASE (Lesotho) said that, in March 1993, Lesotho had peacefully changed from a military Government to a civilian multi-party democracy. While it was true that only one party was represented in Parliament, that should not be a source of concern, since the Government had committed itself to a free press, the opposition parties were invited to the Senate and the Ministry of Justice and Human Rights ensured that democracy was well protected.

23. His delegation was fully aware of the heavy task awaiting UNHCR. Singularly and collectively, all States had a responsibility towards the victims of war and famine throughout the world. Some progress had been achieved in some areas where the conflicts had been peacefully resolved. Regrettably, there were still some parts of the world where concerted efforts were needed to alleviate the suffering of the victims. Of course, budgetary constraints would inevitably limit UNHCR's activities. However, it was to be hoped that member countries would contribute generously according to their commitments and capabilities to allow the smooth operation of integration and resettlement programmes.

24. Lesotho had for many years enjoyed a fruitful association and cooperation with UNHCR. The situation had eased, but ominous clouds still hovered over the horizon as South Africa entered the last stages of the dismantling of apartheid. It was recognized that freedom would not automatically lead to peace and economic progress. Continuing inter-ethnic fighting and murders dampened any hopes of seeing South African refugees return quickly to their country; in fact, their number in Lesotho had tripled.

25. The Government of Lesotho would honour its international commitments, in particular those relating to refugees and human rights. It would always stand ready to receive bona fide refugees fleeing from the scourge of political persecution and massacres. It would always endeavcur to practise a liberal policy of full integration of refugees into the mainstream of its social fabric. In that regard, it had such instruments as the Refugees Act of 1983 and the refugee regulations of 1986, as well as other texts containing the relevant international instruments.

26. At the forty-third session of the Executive Committee, he had made a plea for peace, reconciliation and the promotion of economic development. That was the common desire of all peoples and those in southern Africa had at the present time some hope of seeing it achieved. In South Africa, the negotiations were continuing and general elections were scheduled for 27 April 1994. Lesotho had also noted with satisfaction that an agreement had been concluded between the South African Republic and UNHCR which should, inter alia, make it possible to begin the repatriation of Mozambican refugees once a tripartite agreement had been signed by UNHCR, the Republic of South Africa and Mozambique.

27. The situation was still volatile in the southern region of Africa. Since July 1993, Lesotho had received people from South Africa seeking protection only seven months before the proposed elections of 27 April 1994. Faced with that influx of South African refugees, Lesotho hoped that it would be able to continue to rely on UNHCR's assistance.

28. The new Lesotho Government would play its role bilaterally and internationally in order to settle international disputes peacefully and cooperate in the social and economic improvement of peoples so that there would be no more political and economic refugees.

29. Mr. VAN WULFFTEN PALTHE (Netherlands) said that, further to the statement made on behalf of the Community and its member States by the representative of Belgium at the preceding meeting, his delegation wished to share with the members of the Executive Committee and observers its views on improving the response by the United Nations system to the urgent needs of the internally displaced.

30. While the collapse of the Berlin Wall, which had symbolized the end of the cold war, had offered the prospect of enduring peace in the world, that event had soon been followed by disintegration, ethnic strife and armed conflict resulting in mass movements of people in Europe, as well as in Africa and Asia. Faced with that situation, the international community should organize itself in such a way as to be able to deal with the new challenges. That applied not only to States, but also and even more importantly, to international organizations such as the United Nations, which was relied upon to cope with crisis situations in the world.

31. UNHCR provided protection to the persons to whom the 1951 Convention applied and that protection had proved adequate in the past. However, at the present time, more people were uprooted who did not fall under the 1951 Convention then those who did and official figures concerning refugees and internally displaced persons reflected only a portion of the actual number of

victims of war and civil and ethnic strife. The United Nations system had not formally assigned any general responsibility with regard to the protection of persons in refugee-like situations, i.e. internally displaced persons and those under siege. Of course, UNHCR had, on an ad hoc basis and at the request of the Secretary-General, been involved repeatedly in the protection of internally displaced persons on the basis of its experience with refugees in comparable situations. As a result of that case-by-case approach, those persons had no agency comparable to UNHCR to turn to when they were forced to flee their homes. That shortcoming had occupied the attention of United Nations operational agencies, ICRC and the NGO community, as well as others within the system, for almost a decade. On the threshold of the twenty-first century, it was not possible to leave unsolved a problem whose importance, reflected in the documents before the Executive Committee, had been recognized by the Commission on Human Rights and the World Conference on Human Rights.

32. It would therefore be necessary for the international community to provide the United Nations with the structural basis to enable it to protect people in refugee-like situations. The time had come to proceed from the current ad hoc arrangement within the United Nations system to the assignment of general competence to UNHCR to provide protection to internally disabled persons and local populations under siege in refugee-like and potential refugee-generating situations. The Executive Committee might therefore deem it appropriate to recommend that the General Assembly should authorize UNHCR, in certain conditions and in the light of the means at its disposal, to ensure the protection of those categories of persons. In that connection, he supported the request just made by the representative of Sweden.

33. In conclusion, he made it clear that he was not advocating that UNHCR should duplicate the work of organizations such as ICRC or non-governmental organizations. He was simply drawing attention to the need for a more structural arrangement within the United Nations. Furthermore, UNHCR should not necessarily be the only organization to provide material assistance to internally displaced persons. The concept of assigning lead agencies, which often involved complex coordination, had proved to be a satisfactory way of dealing with that problem and, while UNHCR had frequently been called upon to perform that function, UNICEF or WFP had proved to be equally effective. The assignment of the lead agency was decided on a case-by-case basis at the present time and account was taken of which organization was best placed in a certain situation to assume that function.

34. Lastly, he said that his delegation had submitted a draft conclusion on internally displaced persons to the secretariat and would welcome any comments on that text.

35. Mr. MUSA (Nigeria) said that, more than 40 years after the adoption of the 1951 Convention, the status of refugees continued to deteriorate and become more complex. The causes of massive displacements and exoduses which resulted in refugee problems were only too well known: geopolitical, ethnic, religious or economic conflicts, natural and man-made catastrophes and human rights violations, to mention only a few. However, the main factors were related to economic problems and human rights violations. The debt burden and

the conditionalities imposed by the Bretton Woods institutions had not only created political instability in many developing countries, but had also aggravated crises on an unprecedented scale.

36. If UNHCR, which was a member of the international community, did not seriously deal with the problem of abject poverty and underdevelopment and did not institutionalize the promotion and enjoyment of human rights, its search for durable solutions to the refugee problem would be futile. With the emergence of a new world order, it was clear that crises and problems were becoming universal and should be seen as such.

37. The pressures on international, regional and subregional organizations in general and on the United Nations in particular were substantial and, in the absence of ensured funding, created specific difficulties. However, there was widespread recognition that a system of global governance was no longer an option, but a necessity.

38. The rapidly growing upsurge of conflicts and ethnic and religious intolerance over the past year, since the most recent session of the Executive Committee, had put the international community to a serious test of its ability to provide adequate humanitarian response. That kind of assistance should be accompanied by development aid and, to that end, the building and strengthening of local institutions should be among the priorities of the United Nations.

39. His delegation appreciated the efforts which UNHCR was making to ensure that refugees enjoyed international protection. That initiative should also involve the application of laws and humanitarian principles to secure and promote the rights, security and welfare of refugees. Many victims did not enjoy international protection because of the inadequacy of the current definition of refugee. The international community should recognize that inadequacy and endeavour to expand the legal responsibility of States with regard to the protection of all refugees.

40. His delegation was also concerned about the diversity of the definitions and interpretations being given to the concept of non-refoulement and considered it important to have a uniform standard definition of the principle of refoulement or non-refoulement. Furthermore, asylum-seekers should not be returned to a third country unless the returning country had first sought assurances that, in the third country, the asylum-seeker would be granted effective and durable protection. In that connection, he called for the conclusion of an international agreement on minimum procedural standards for considering asylum requests. Furthermore, his delegation appealed to all States to ensure that they did not fall below international standards when taking decisions on refugee definitions and legislation.

41. Contrary to the hopes that had arisen following the end of the cold war, the refugee population had been growing steadily, while the means for their maintenance were inadequate. The economic crisis in nearly every country had had an adverse effect on contributions to UNHCR. If that trend continued, UNHCR's financial situation could become dramatic. His delegation was particularly impressed with the prudent manner in which the High Commissioner had been handling the limited resources available, especially in view of the

extension of UNHCR's activities in the areas of large-scale relief programmes for refugees, massive repatriation and resettlement. In that regard, UNHCR's financial situation deserved serious attention, as shown in the report of the High Commissioner. The increase in the number of refugees required a corresponding increase in the resources allocated to UNHCR. Nigeria commended the donor countries, renewed its appeal for the latter to increase their financial contributions and called on the United Nations system to make more funds available for refugee matters.

42. His country wished to remind the Executive Committee of the problem of internally displaced persons. Although that question did not come within UNHCR's mandate, the Office should take note of the activities of the United Nations bodies concerned with human rights, in particular those of the Commission on Human Rights.

43. Mr. TABESH (Islamic Republic of Iran) said that he was deeply grateful to the High Commissioner for Refugees for the remarkable introductory statement which she had made at the preceding meeting and which reflected a clear indication of her insight into the Afghan refugee situation in Iran. He hoped that her appeal would encourage the international community to provide the necessary financial and moral support. As the first refugee host country in the world, the Islamic Republic of Iran unreservedly supported UNHCR's humanitarian activities, since it believed that UNHCR could become an effective instrument for assisting victims and eventually establishing peace and security only if it enjoyed the extensive support of States.

44. The number of refugees and the dimensions of refugee problems were making the situation increasingly complex and multifaceted. Almost without exception, refugees were appearing with every political, social and economic crisis in the world. Consequently, the refugee problem could no longer be addressed by a simple humanitarian approach which traditionally neglected the underlying root causes that were to be found at the present time in breaches of human rights, ethnic cleansing, xenophobia, the economic and social situation, natural or man-made disasters and the lack of basic socio-economic infrastructures in countries of origin.

45. On the other hand, the nature of the problem had changed dramatically since the Second World War and the world was increasingly faced with situations that were completely different from those prevailing in the 1950s. As a result of those changes, millions of desperate persons might threaten peace and security in various parts of the world because, as human beings, they wished to live in dignity. A proper solution to their problem should be based on a comprehensive approach encompassing preventive measures and refugee aid with due attention to developmental elements. In that regard, he stressed once again that assisting broad-based economic growth and social development was the key to avoiding new refugee movements. That principle, which had been recognized in various General Assembly and Executive Committee resolutions, had never been seriously implemented.

46. As the barriers of the cold war crumbled, new walls and fortifications had been built up to prevent refugee access to the developed world. In that regard, it was very unfortunate that the majority of the initial parties to the 1951 Convention, which were developed countries, prevented asylum-seekers

from crossing their borders or postponed consideration of asylum requests. The developed countries were mistaken in assuming that walls and obstacles could prevent or even restrict refugee inflows. As long as the root causes were not properly addressed, the problem could only worsen. Far from wishing to expand the mandate of UNHCR, to redefine the concept of refugee or to question the validity of the 1951 Convention, his country proposed a new approach to the refugee problem, taking account of the new international realities and using existing international instruments. In that connection, the drafters of the 1951 Convention had provided it with the dynamism and flexibility it needed to remain valid in an ever-changing world.

47. Referring to developments in the refugee situation in his country, he said that, despite the repatriation of more than 1 million Afghan and Iraqi refugees, the Islamic Republic of Iran still hosted more than 2,600,000 refugees. As international assistance for those refugees continued to be minimal and out of proportion to their number, his country had had to use its own national resources. That had always been a great burden, particularly during the reconstruction period after the war and as a result of the many natural disasters it had to cope with each year.

48. The large-scale operation involving the voluntary repatriation of Afghan refugees had continued to be his country's most preoccupying task during the past year. The spontaneous repatriation movement that had begun in early 1992 had, since December 1992, come under a programme implemented by a tripartite commission composed of representatives of the Governments of Afghanistan and of the Islamic Republic of Iran and UNHCR, in collaboration with the World Food Programme (WFP) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM). Under that programme, all Afghan refugees wishing to return to their country were offered free transportation facilities by IOM up to the border, where they received a UNHCR/WFP assistance package before departure. The latest statistics report indicated that, by the end of September 1993, nearly 800,000 Afghan refugees had regained their country voluntarily and that only 300,000 had received a package. He stressed the need for UNHCR and WFP to continue providing assistance to the remaining Afghan refugees, estimated to number about 1,919,000, under their regular programmes. At the request of the Afghan Government, the Iranian Government had extended numerous facilities to those refugees. In addition, it had launched a registration programme in August 1993 under which nearly 200,000 Afghan refugees had been able to be registered.

49. It was his country's policy to encourage, through material incentives, the voluntary, dignified and safe repatriation of Afghan refugees, with a view to ensuring a return to peace and a normal socio-economic life in the country. The increase in assistance, while necessary and useful in the short term, might not be conducive to the restoration of normal life in the long term. It should be emphasized that the underdevelopment of socio-economic infrastructures in Afghanistan was the major obstacle in that regard, as Mrs. Ogata herself had recently noted. Repatriation to Afghanistan must be planned in both countries in a comprehensive and coordinated manner and the efforts of the United Nations system and NGOs designed to reconstruct Afghanistan should be oriented towards repatriation, as well as towards development.

50. The Iraqi Kurd and Arab refugees who had sought refuge in the Islamic Republic of Iran in the 1980s constituted the second largest refugee group in his country. Since the preceding session of the Executive Committee, nearly 286,300 refugees had gradually been repatriated voluntarily. At the present time, about 695,000 remained in his country; to that figure should be added 4,700 Iraqi refugees who had entered the country following the opening of the southern borders. UNHCR had recently taken measures to resettle the refugees in safer and better-equipped camps in the centre of the country. During the summer of 1993, nearly 30,000 Iraqi refugees had requested his Government's assistance in order to be able to return to their country.

51. Following the conflicts between Azerbaijan and Armenia, which had led to the displacement of hundreds of thousands of Azeris, the Islamic Republic of Iran, out of a desire to provide humanitarian assistance and at the request of the Republic of Azerbaijan, had decided to establish a camp with a capacity of 100,000 persons in Imshili district. The initial groundwork had been done and the settlement facilities should be completed before the beginning of winter. In that regard, his country was prepared to do its utmost to facilitate the transit of international assistance for the Azeris before the situation turned into another emergency. It also reaffirmed its view that stockpiling of emergency assistance items in the region was a dire necessity and that such a procedure was the only way to ensure a speedy, effective and timely reaction by the United Nations system to emergency situations.

52. Mrs. GREEN (Observer for Mexico) recalled that the Concerted Plan of Action of the International Conference on Central American Refugees (CIREFCA) had been adopted in May 1989 by the Central American countries, Belize and Mexico in an attempt to provide durable solutions to the problems of refugees in the region. The CIREFCA Follow-up Committee, composed of the representatives of the seven member countries, was supported by United Nations bodies, in particular the High Commissioner for Refugees and the United Nations Development Programme. The results of the implementation of the plan, carried out by the Committee, had been largely positive, as had been noted by all the countries which had provided political and financial support for the efforts made by the States concerned to encourage voluntary repatriation, to reduce considerably the number of refugees in the region and to help the repatriated people to be reintegrated in the institutional and economic life of their countries of origin. In that regard, a tribute should be paid to all the countries which had shown so much generosity and made it possible, between May 1989 and January 1993, to mobilize nearly $250 million in favour of Central American refugees.

53. As the CIREFCA Concerted Plan of Action was to end in May 1994, its implementation could already be evaluated. In the first place, all those concerned, including the countries affected, cooperating Governments, non-governmental organizations, the populations involved and United Nations agencies, had constantly tried to reach a consensus in adopting solutions for the restoration and consolidation of peace, as well as for the development of the region. The CIREFCA Follow-up Committee had thus regularly held meetings of representatives of the Governments of the seven member countries, who had exchanged views, shared their experiences and reached a consensus in seeking solutions to problems that went beyond political borders. Close coordination had also been established with non-governmental organizations, which played a

major role in support for development and whose activities had had largely beneficial effects on displaced persons. Moreover, ties between affected countries, members of the international community and the United Nations system had been strengthened, support groups had made it possible to maintain a constant exchange of information between the countries involved and the cooperating countries on developments in the situation and inter-agency coordination between UNHCR and UNDP had been extremely positive.

54. There was no doubt that CIREFCA had contributed to the promotion of respect for the fundamental rights of the displaced persons, both in the host countries and in the countries of origin, and to the promotion of international humanitarian law, as demonstrated by the increase in the number of countries that had ratified the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol. Furthermore, efforts had been made to find durable solutions to refugee problems, particularly through the promulgation of internal legislation facilitating the reintegration of repatriated or displaced persons in various countries of the region.

55. All the countries affected in Central America had demonstrated the necessary political will to seek firm and durable solutions to the extremely complex problems caused by armed conflicts and population displacement and, for its part, the CIREFCA Follow-up Committee had tried, as the restoration of peace was proceeding, to assist all the populations affected by the conflict, without any discrimination whatever. The member countries of the Committee were aware that peace and development were inseparable and had adopted strategies and programmes designed to consolidate peace and encourage development, while protecting the environment. Quick impact projects had therefore been undertaken in the majority of countries in the region, thus helping considerably to ensure the reintegration of the repatriated persons in their communities of origin and their participation in the development process, as well as the integration of refugees who chose to stay in their host country. In that regard, the Development Programme for Displaced Persons, Refugees and Returnees (PRODERE), executed by UNDP in six countries in collaboration with UNHCR, the ILO, the Pan American Health Organization and the World Health Organization, was the most important programme carried out by CIREFCA to solve the problems of the persons concerned and to stimulate the development process. It should be stressed that all the efforts thus undertaken were accompanied by studies and measures aimed at protecting the environment. Special efforts had also been made to improve the situation of women refugees with a view to taking account of the specific requirements of women and their capacity to participate in development.

56. Despite the positive results thus achieved, the implementation of the CIREFCA Plan of Action had not made it possible to solve all the extremely complex problems that continued to arise in the region. The restoration of peace was a difficult task, but the consolidation of peace through development was a monumental undertaking requiring both a firm political will and even more resources than those which had been devoted to the problems of displaced persons during the past four years. It would therefore be necessary to assist the populations that had difficulties in exercising fully their civil, political, socio-economic and other rights, strengthen and diversify consultation processes, continue the efforts being made to protect and defend human rights, adopt new technical means of creating genuine conditions of

self-sufficiency, establish ties between local and national planning bodies and encourage United Nations agencies to strengthen their coordination and effectiveness. UNDP would clearly be the best United Nations agency capable of providing the necessary technical assistance, but human development would become a reality only through the participation of other agencies, particularly UNHCR. That was the only way in which progress would be made and definitive solutions found to the problems of displacement, social marginalization and extreme poverty. It was to be hoped that, in future, the international community and the United Nations system would support the efforts of the countries that had participated in CIREFCA with the same enthusiasm as that shown by them during the past four years.

57. Mr. LEBEDEV (Observer for the Russian Federation) said that the changes in Eastern Europe, particularly in the territory of the former Soviet Union and neighbouring regions, had given rise to vast movements of refugees which had directly affected the world migration situation, a fact that had been clearly recognized by the international community. Henceforth, Russia had to deal at the same time with the exodus phenomenon and the massive arrival of refugees. To meet all those problems, Russia, which had already acceded to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol, had at the beginning of 1993 established the Federal Migration Service, a Government agency with broad powers. However, the task was complex and difficult because of the current political crisis in Russia, the lack of qualified personnel and the precarious social and economic situation in the regions where the displacements were taking place. As the Russian Federation was poorly prepared to cope with the problems of refugees, it sincerely hoped that information campaigns and training seminars would be intensified so that it would be able to comply with recognized international standards relating to refugees. It welcomed the support provided by the Office of the High Commissioner, which had enabled it to pursue its efforts in cooperation with the international community. That action should be intensified and new methods and strategies adopted, as the World Conference on Human Rights had stated, in order to address the root causes and defects of movements of refugees and other displaced persons in a coordinated manner and in cooperation with UNHCR.

58. However, it seemed that the existing international structures were not sufficient to meet the needs of refugees and displaced persons and it might therefore be necessary to consider the possibility of convening a worldwide forum that could discuss new methods and proposals in the light of the global crisis in order to fund a long-term solution to the situation that endangered the international community. To that end, account should be taken of the role and functions of UNHCR, a leading United Nations humanitarian body which was successfully fulfilling its responsibilities. However, UNHCR's mandate was rather limited because, without special authorization, it could not intervene in cases involving forcibly displaced persons, whereas the status of those persons was actually similar to that of refugees.

59. Recent developments showed that there was an obvious need to strengthen the international regime relating to refugees. His delegation was particularly concerned that some countries were beginning to adopt stricter measures in respect of asylum-seekers and were building protective walls which were in principle designed to combat xenophobia, racism and aggressive

nationalism, but which in reality amounted to a refusal to share the burden. UNHCR had to help combat the human rights violations which were the result of the mass migrations of refugees, in close cooperation with the United Nations Centre for Human Rights and the High Commissioner for Human Rights, whose post should be established as soon as possible. The United Nations Department of Humanitarian Affairs could play a leading role in that regard, in cooperation with UNHCR and other international humanitarian agencies, including the NGOs. UNHCR should also be encouraged to synchronize humanitarian activities with the protection and promotion of human rights during United Nations peacekeeping operations and to integrate human rights monitoring as a preventive measure in negotiations relating to the settlement of conflicts.

60. With regard to the difficult question of forcibly displaced persons, the first step could be to draft a regional convention on forcibly displaced persons for Europe containing clear criteria and defining the responsibility of United Nations bodies for the protection of persons forced to migrate within their own country. The Russian Federation expressed its appreciation to UNHCR for the assistance it had provided to help it deal with the deep and extremely dangerous crisis which it was experiencing in that field and which jeopardized the stability of neighbouring countries. The international community should be aware of the need to intensify efforts and to provide additional resources to solve the problem which existed in Russia and which placed a tremendous burden on the national economy. It was to be hoped that UNHCR would stimulate the interest which the problem was beginning to elicit on the part of world public opinion and be able to coordinate the assistance to be offered in order to finance urgent and long-term refugee aid programmes. It would also be useful to develop an efficient system of emergency humanitarian operations in order to ensure better coordination of such operations and to protect the staff who were engaged in them and whose lives were frequently threatened.

61. The Russian Federation was prepared to contribute to those humanitarian operations, to serve as an intermediary for the supply of humanitarian assistance to the newly independent States if they expressed such a wish and to provide storage facilities in its territory for resources intended for emergency situations in the region. It wanted to be able to make a useful contribution to the formulation of specific measures to be undertaken by the international community to cope with the serious impact of migration on political, economic and social stability. In that spirit of cooperation, it hoped to become a member of the Executive Committee of UNHCR.

62. Mr. MTANGO (United Republic of Tanzania) said that 1992, which was seen as the start of a decade of voluntary repatriation, had witnessed conflicts and persecution that had forced millions of persons in Bosnia, Cambodia, Liberia, Haiti and many other places to leave their homes. The international community had commendably responded adequately to appeals for assistance by refugees from Eastern Europe. It should also bear in mind the plight of refugees in other parts of the world, particularly in Africa. Angola, for example, was experiencing the world's worst humanitarian calamity, one of the "silent calamities" to which the High Commissioner had referred. Africa had taken measures to solve its problems and achieved some success in Liberia, Rwanda and Burundi, but its efforts must be supported by the allocation of

adequate resources to UNHCR programmes in those countries. In particular, it was essential for the repatriation programmes planned for Mozambique, Rwanda and Burundi to get started in 1994.

63. The success of the repatriation programmes in Africa presupposed that the international community would help rebuild the infrastructure of the countries of origin and therefore that the High Commissioner would draw up adequate plans in advance for those programmes so that the returnees' basic social amenities corresponded to those they had enjoyed while in asylum. UNHCR should also take the lead in making the development agencies fully aware of the situation so that they would fully participate in the repatriation and reintegration programmes. The High Commissioner had mentioned the possibility of a new exodus of Mozambican returnees if the necessary infrastructures were not put in place. That problem should be solved before repatriation from South Africa began, following the excellent agreement recently concluded between UNHCR and the Governments of Mozambique and South Africa. With regard to Burundi and Rwanda, each of those two countries hosted refugees from the other, and that made it necessary to view those two repatriation operations as a single integrated regional programme, ensuring a common approach applicable to both in terms of treatment and benefits and including basically the same plan of action for assistance in the host country and reintegration in the country of origin.

64. The problem of refugees in the traditional meaning of the term and that of internally displaced persons, who were considerably greater in number and whose situation was particularly serious in the third world countries, were intertwined and required a similar approach and solution. It seemed that UNHCR provided assistance to internally displaced persons under a cross-border and cross-mandate approach, but the Executive Committee should seriously consider recommending a more clearly defined mandate for the High Commissioner that would enable her to extend her role with greater confidence to the protection of displaced persons. In any event, a durable solution of the African refugee problem required that the refugees should receive basic education and vocational training, which would enable them to be self-reliant both in the host country and, subsequently, in the country of origin. The High Commissioner should also accelerate the action undertaken to revise the guidelines and policies concerning the protection of refugee women and children, make field officers more aware of the situation and establish appropriate social programmes for that vulnerable group, in very close cooperation with UNICEF and other competent agencies.

65. UNHCR's basic function centred around providing legal protection and ensuring the right of any refugee to request asylum, with a broader application of the term "protection" including physical safety and liberty. UNHCR field staff, in cooperation with the host countries concerned, should therefore stress the need to train and instruct the police, immigration and local authorities so that those basic principles were appropriately applied. The countries concerned, particularly in the developing world, could only benefit from an innovative and comprehensive approach to refugee questions. In that regard, the countries of Europe and North America were urged not to adopt arrangements that eroded internationally established principles and standards of refugee protection and would also have the effect of undermining the humanitarian function of UNHCR and the international consensus that formed

the basis of the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees. The Executive Committee should therefore reaffirm the importance of existing guidelines and the relevant conclusions on the protection of refugees. He expressed his appreciation to the donor community for its generosity, particularly since the countries in question were facing an economic recession, and expressed the hope that the same spirit would continue to prevail so that UNHCR could adequately fulfil its mandate. The United Republic of Tanzania, which also donated resources in kind, would continue that tradition and assured the High Commissioner of its constant support.

66. Mr. ZAHRAN (Observer for Egypt) commended UNHCR on the considerable efforts it was making to provide protection and assistance to refugees and displaced persons, in particular to those who formed the largest and most vulnerable segment, namely, women and children. The problem of refugees and displaced persons, which continued to grow in scope, should be addressed in a humanitarian manner, since the fundamental principles relating to human rights were universal standards binding on all peoples, nations, societies and individuals. The problem should also be approached in all its aspects, including the causes of the phenomenon and the means to prevent its appearance. The constant numerical and geographical extension of that problem and the deterioration of the situation of those who were its victims were matters of considerable concern. The forms it took in Africa and in the former Yugoslavia also indicated changes and new challenges which made it necessary for the international community to improve its methods and programmes for the protection of refugees and displaced persons with a view to adapting them to new situations.

67. He stressed that reciprocal and close cooperation and coordination had to be established between the various United Nations agencies with a view to increasing the effectiveness of their activities in the field of preventive action and eliminating the causes of refugee flows, on the one hand, and between the international and regional organizations operating in that area, on the other. His delegation welcomed the close cooperation that existed between UNHCR's Regional Bureau in Cairo and the Egyptian Government and other Governments in the region, as well as between the various bodies carrying out humanitarian activities in the Egyptian capital. It also pointed out that, at the 29th Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the Organization of African Unity, held in June 1993 in Egypt, a mechanism for the prevention and settlement of conflicts in the continent had been created which could help solve the problem by dealing with its causes. In respect of prevention, there was also a need for cooperation between UNHCR and the Centre for Human Rights in monitoring human rights violations to prevent them from becoming more serious. The dramatic events in the former Yugoslavia confirmed the need to assign absolute priority to relief and humanitarian assistance and to measures that would enable UNHCR and the other competent bodies to carry out their mission. The events in Somalia and Liberia, like those in the former Yugoslavia, also confirmed the need to ensure the protection of the staff entrusted with that mission.

68. On the African continent, refugees numbered about 6 million, i.e. one third of all the refugees in the world, and displaced persons numbered 15 million. That situation, which was continually deteriorating, was the

cause of considerable human, material and moral losses and hampered the development of countries already facing many other difficulties. Hence the need to coordinate the action of all agencies involved in humanitarian relief at the international, regional and local levels. In that connection, Egypt congratulated UNHCR on the agreement concluded with South Africa and Mozambique.

69. Egypt expressed its great appreciation of the efforts made by ICRC and the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies to ensure the protection of refugees and displaced persons in situations of armed conflict. It also appreciated the praiseworthy work done by the International Institute of Humanitarian Law to develop and disseminate international law relating to refugees and their protection and international humanitarian law through the various seminars and round tables which it organized and in which diplomats from various regions of the world and representatives of non-governmental organizations also took part. That action, in which UNHCR collaborated, had been quite fruitful and many of the recommendations made in that framework had subsequently been adopted by the Executive Committee. The round table on humanitarian law in situations of armed conflict had demonstrated the importance of a frank and open dialogue on burning humanitarian problems and the courses organized by the Institute for Government officials and representatives of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies had made a substantial contribution to the improvement of humanitarian action and its adaptation to the changes taking place at the international level. In view of those changes and those new challenges, the international community had a duty to be more resolute and interdependent in its action, both preventive and curative.

The meeting rose at 5.45 p.m.

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EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE PROGRAMME OF THE UNITED NATIONS
HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES

Forty-fourth session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 483rd MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Tuesday, 5 October 1993, at 10 a.m.

Chairman: Mr. BODDENS-HOSANG (Netherlands)

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General debate (continued)

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GE.93-02704 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

GENERAL DEBATE (agenda item 4) (continued)

1. Mr. TARRE MURZI (Venezuela) said that a meeting of UNHCR had perhaps never been as timely and necessary as now, when mankind was again divided between peace and war, poverty and development, conciliation and aggression and tolerance and ideological sectarianism. The High Commissioner had stressed the need to coordinate humanitarian and peace-keeping operations and Venezuela agreed with that concern. UNHCR's activities could be successful only if they enjoyed the political support of the international community. Hence the need for backing from the Secretary-General and the Security Council. At present, 19 million refugees depended on UNHCR, yet that figure could well increase in view of the situations in the former Yugoslavia, western Africa and Bangladesh, not to mention the thousands of displaced persons who were technically not covered by the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees or its 1967 Protocol.

2. The focus of UNHCR's mandate must remain refugees: any expansion of its responsibilities might jeopardize and undermine its work. Accordingly, in situations involving internally displaced persons, other organizations and Governments themselves must assume their responsibilities and coordinate their activities.

3. Voluntary repatriation, as the High Commissioner had pointed out, must go beyond mere logistics and create conditions of security for reintegration, especially in countries like Afghanistan and Mozambique. The United Nations and non-governmental organizations must cooperate in rehabilitation and development efforts. International efforts had to be made to resolve the root causes of the problem of refugees and displaced persons and prevention seemed to be the most constructive long-term solution.

4. Venezuela welcomed the efforts made by the Office of the High Commissioner to strengthen its capacity to respond to emergency situations and approved of the agreements it had signed with the United Nations Volunteers as a means of enhancing its activities. The improvement of human resource management despite difficult conditions and the lack of security for staff was also a welcome development. Venezuela supported the establishment of priorities for assistance, in view of the gap between UNHCR's resources and the volume of requests for humanitarian assistance.

5. The agreement between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization and the new wave of understanding among the peoples of the Middle East made the international situation look promising: perhaps the long decades of conflict and senseless war would soon come to an end. Yet side by side with growing understanding among Arabs and Jews, there was the sad spectacle of war in many parts of Europe, Africa, Asia and Latin America. His Government was concerned about the recent developments in Moscow and hoped to see normalcy, peace and the rule of law re-established in Russia.

6. If the world was to resolve the tragic plight of individuals who were persecuted, displaced and uprooted, it must rid itself of the traditional, materialistic view of human existence and adopt a new ecumenical commitment to

international social justice. His delegation attached special importance to the statement made at the 481st meeting by the representative of the United States, in which he had recalled his Government's efforts to get to the root of the major problems resulting from armed conflict in the former Yugoslavia, the former Soviet Union, Angola, Mozambique and other regions. Those words inspired optimism about the future of mankind in the next century.

7. As the representative of Thailand had pointed out at the 481st meeting, certain institutions and legal principles were being undermined at present. The right of asylum, for example, was being questioned and, in some democratic States of Europe, its revocation was being sought. It was to be hoped that that did not constitute an outbreak of xenophobia that might subsequently turn into intolerance and political and social repression. Some members of the Executive Committee which had an excellent track record as far as the rights of citizens, minorities and victims of injustice were concerned now seemed inclined to modify the traditional right of asylum by an ambiguous formulation permitting racial, social, political, ideological and ethical discrimination. That absurd and incomprehensible manifestation of chauvinism could degenerate into a veritable witch hunt that bore comparison with the period between the wars when Europe had been beset by the evils of persecution and racial and religious discrimination. Such phenomena should be discussed within UNHCR so that international public opinion would be alerted early on to the growing opposition to asylum for the millions of refugees seeking only peace, work and security.

8. He congratulated UNHCR on its successes in Cambodia, Thailand, Central America (CIREFCA) and the Caribbean and expressed the hope that similar results would be achieved in Mozambique and Malawi. Venezuela urged the international community to arrive at a consensus with a view to taking steps to solve existing protection problems, particularly those relating to young refugees and sexual violence against women and girls. It was necessary now more than ever to strengthen UNHCR, for its work was essential in a world agitated by the spread of absurd conflicts and senseless killings in the Balkans, between Russians and national groups that had formerly belonged to the USSR, and in a number of towns in Africa and Latin America.

9. There was a place in the world for all races and peoples; for victims of injustice, refugees and those left behind by economic development. The attention paid to individuals would determine the fate of mankind. Only through a new international structure under the auspices of UNHCR and with the assistance of the developed countries could racism, xenophobia, and the exploitation of man by man be ended so that there would no longer be 19 million refugees and 24 million displaced persons on earth. Such were the desires and aspirations of the Government and people of Venezuela.

10. Mr. SEVILLA SIERO (Nicaragua) noted that the introduction to document A/AC.96/813 indicated that the period 1992-1993 had seen the largest flow ever recorded of refugees. The situation was still more dramatic when it was recalled that, in the 1950s, when the Office of the High Commissioner had been created, the word "refugee" had referred to what had been almost exclusively a European phenomenon, resulting from the Second World War and it had been expected that the phenomenon would disappear by the end of the decade. However, time in its passage had been relentless and harsher than

expected. In the 1960s, decolonization had taken the phenomenon to Africa and, in the 1970s, it had moved onward to Asia and part of Latin America, owing to dictatorial regimes. The phenomenon had been exacerbated in the 1970s, with the millions of Afghan refugees and the fratricidal internal disputes in Central America. Now, in the 1990s, the refugee phenomenon was returning to wreak havoc on European soil, while at the same time making inroads on other continents as well.

11. The traditional concept of "refugee" as set out in the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol no longer applied to the variety and gravity of problems faced by millions of displaced persons seeking refuge, not only from armed confrontation, but also from poverty, hunger, drought, etc.

12. When legal texts were overtaken by real events, it was necessary to fill in the gaps and that could be done through redoubled support for the Office of the High Commissioner. The legal instruments governing the status of refugees could be brought up to date on the basis of the skill, courage and intelligence being brought to bear on finding lasting solutions.

13. His Government supported the statement made by the representative of Mexico in her capacity as Chairman of the CIREFCA Follow-up Committee. Some of the guiding principles of CIREFCA's action were the strengthening of peace, national reconciliation and democracy, as well as persistent efforts to create the necessary conditions for the reintegration of displaced populations. Any measure of peace and democracy achieved would be tenuous if not accompanied by an effort to go beyond the stage of humanitarian assistance. It was therefore appropriate that countries should continue with the goodwill they had shown in the four years since the adoption by CIREFCA of the Concerted Plan of Action in 1989.

14. While the international community had expressed satisfaction with the CIREFCA model, support would still be required in the upcoming transitional stage. That transition must not be relegated to a mere problem of dates and schedules, for the problems involved could not be programmed with mathematical rigour. It was not because UNDP would be involved in post-CIREFCA activities that the assistance of other agencies, including UNHCR, would no longer be needed. UNHCR must continue to support the efforts of the CIREFCA countries.

15. His Government had recently submitted a set of proposals to the CIREFCA Joint Support Unit for an action plan for 1993-1996 and a number of Quick Impact Projects to last three years, starting in January 1994. The submission of the action plan had been motivated by the critical poverty of major sectors of the Nicaraguan population. The disparity between the demands of certain population groups and the Government's limited response capacity had resulted in the reappearance of armed groups, representing a serious threat to the process of peace and economic revival.

16. The QIP proposal had been motivated by the fact that hundreds of families had been displaced and by the serious limitations on the country's resources. That combination of circumstances made it essential to combine efforts to respond rapidly to the needs of those population sectors. Nicaragua was requesting economic support from the international community for the financing of both the action plan and the Quick Impact Projects.

17. The question of population displacement must remain on the international political agenda, although UNHCR must continue to adopt a humanitarian and apolitical approach.

18. Mr. MORKVED (Norway) said that, in the past year, UNHCR had been faced with new opportunities for positive action and with painful dilemmas. The High Commissioner's threefold policy of preparedness, prevention and solutions seemed increasingly pertinent as a framework for concerted international action regarding refugees and displaced persons. His Government was pleased that a systematic collaborative approach to complex humanitarian emergencies was gaining momentum, as evidenced by the partnership in action being instituted between UNHCR and non-governmental organizations. The intent was to maximize the capacity of all the agencies involved to respond more effectively to the humanitarian needs of populations affected by conflicts. He extended a warm welcome to all those who would participate in the related Oslo conference in 1994.

19. While 1993 had seen the emergence of new refugee populations, some long-standing refugee problems had nevertheless been solved and the refugees had been able to return home. Voluntary repatriation in safety and dignity was the most satisfactory remedy to forced exile, implying that countries of origin assumed their responsibility for safeguarding the rights of their citizens. His delegation commended the High Commissioner on her consistent promotion of voluntary repatriation as the best durable solution and stressed the importance of providing adequate information to refugees. Some repatriation operations were hampered by financial constraints. His Government had decided to allocate an additional US$ 1 million to the special operation for the repatriation of Mozambican refugees.

20. With regard to asylum, Norway fully recognized its obligations as a party to the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol. The continuous influx of asylum-seekers without a valid claim did, however, call for new mechanisms and for international cooperation to maintain and strengthen the viability of the institution of asylum. The strain placed on asylum systems by irregular population movements and abusive claims constituted a serious challenge to international refugee protection. The development of effective procedures for the determination of asylum claims was vital, as was close cooperation among States. Agreement on concepts such as that of first-asylum countries was paramount in that connection.

21. The principle of non-refoulement was a cornerstone of international refugee law and the basis for State conduct towards refugees. It must be observed when a return to a country of first asylum was being considered. Measures to curb abuse of asylum could be implemented, in his delegation's view, without jeopardizing important legal safeguards ensuring that no refugee would return to a situation of persecution. It was equally important that mechanisms to contain irregular migration should be balanced by measures that offered asylum to those in genuine need of protection.

22. Norway shared the High Commissioner's concern about the need for comprehensive regional arrangements to cover asylum, protection and migration. The emergence of new conflicts in Europe demonstrated the interdependence of governmental policies and practices relating to refugees. The dramatic

outflow of victims of the conflict in the former Yugoslavia had led most European Governments to introduce visa requirements for nationals of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Norway had long refrained from implementing such a policy, but the recent sharp increase in the number of Bosnians seeking protection had made it impossible to maintain that position. The Norwegian Government had thus imposed visa requirements on Bosnian nationals.

23. Abuse of human rights lay at the core of many refugee situations and gross violations of human rights often triggered internal displacement. The internally displaced needed protection and assistance. His Government supported UNHCR's basic criteria for involvement and its efforts to assist internally displaced persons.

24. In the past year, hopes for peace in the former Yugoslavia had been severely tested again and again by protracted atrocities in Bosnia and Herzegovina. There seemed to be no limit to the brutality human beings were capable of in pursuit of the establishment of ethnic nation-States. The time had come to end the bloodshed: another winter of war was only weeks away. A negotiated solution was needed now.

25. Norway was among the major providers of humanitarian assistance to the former Yugoslavia. All of its efforts had been mobilized in close cooperation with UNHCR. Assistance provided by Norway in 1992 had exceeded US$ 22 million. For 1993, and subject to parliamentary approval, Norway had pledged US$ 35 million. Most of that assistance would continue to be channelled through the lead agency, UNHCR. His country attached great importance to the new management structure recently established in Zagreb to coordinate infrastructure, energy and shelter programmes.

26. Norway would continue to lend strong support to UNHCR's humanitarian work and to its leading role in the former Yugoslavia. His delegation echoed the High Commissioner's profound concern for the security of field staff. It deeply regretted that, in many situations, humanitarian access had been severely impaired owing to the high degree of violence and cynical non-observance of the Geneva Conventions by the warring factions.

27. The historic breakthrough in the Middle East revealed that even the deepest trench could be bridged. New hopes for peace and development had been brought to thousands of refugees in a region tormented by conflict for most of the century. His Government felt privileged to have been able to contribute to that process. Norway, together with other countries, was taking practical steps substantially to increase its support to refugees in Gaza and the West Bank. It was of the utmost importance that the fruits of peace should be made tangible and real.

28. Ms. CARRIZOSA de LOPEZ (Colombia) said that, with the challenges represented by an increase in refugee flows and the expansion of UNHCR's activities to cover internal displacement, there was a danger that positions would be adopted on the basis of political rather than humanitarian considerations. In the conditions of violence currently prevailing in Colombia and with the problem of internal displacement in Colombia and Peru, Governments might fall into that very error. If they perceived the High Commissioner's concern as a possible form of interference in the internal

affairs of States, they might consider that national sovereignty was being undermined. It was for that reason that her country wished to make a number of comments.

29. The current emphasis on preventive measures hardly seemed to fit in well with UNHCR's mandate, which was essentially humanitarian. Such an approach would be comparable to having the International Committee of the Red Cross turn from the alleviation of crisis situations towards political measures, such as preventing armed conflict, or other areas of specialization, such as preventing natural disasters. It was its respect for UNHCR's achievements, which mainly related to the right of asylum and non-refoulement, that led Colombia to consider that the Office's support mechanisms should not be undermined.

30. The desire to expand UNHCR's activities into dealing with internal displacement was understandable. The right of international protection should not be denied simply because a displaced person had not crossed a national border. That right could and should be upheld wherever UNHCR's activities were aimed at humanitarian assistance in a crisis situation.

31. It was such a situation that existed now in Colombia, where frightened families and groups of families were temporarily moving to neighbouring areas and where the reasons for displacement were so diverse as to range from confrontations among guerrilla groups, drug traffickers and the forces of order to deficiencies in public services. What preventive action could be taken by UNHCR or any other international agency that had not yet been taken into account in the Colombian Government's strategies for dealing with violence and promoting development?

32. On the other hand, the assistance measures promoted by the Government's Security and Social Emergency Fund did serve and benefit the persons affected by such circumstances. With the assistance of the International Committee of the Red Cross, the Fund dealt with problems of health, transport, housing, food and searches for individuals in order to ensure family reunification.

33. Her Government considered it important that financial and technical cooperation projects should be supported within the United Nations and regional systems in order to help States now seeking to develop structures that would enable them to deal with internal displacement. The purpose should be the provision of strictly humanitarian assistance and aid and the diversion of such laudable cooperation towards grey areas that might be interpreted as a challenge to national sovereignty should be carefully avoided.

34. Mr. HYNINNEN (Finland) said that changes in matters relating to UNHCR's mandate which had occurred in the past few years could not be overestimated. While the situation in regions traditionally associated with generating flows of refugees and displaced persons had remained serious, a European dimension had re-emerged. The number of countries not affected by mass population movements was diminishing, while more and more countries were being asked to help solve the problems involved. The qualitative aspects of the issue had also changed and the continuing tragic situation in the former Yugoslavia, in particular, compelled countries and organizations to adopt a more pragmatic approach towards the new challenges facing them. The scope of present and

potential refugee situations was unlikely to diminish rapidly, at least not in Europe and adjacent geographical areas. His delegation fully shared the High Commissioner's view that continuous adjustment to change was needed both in international organizations and in their member countries.

35. As far as protection was concerned, his country, while remaining committed to its obligations under the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol, shared the view that complex problems were arising from the close association of movements of refugees seeking asylum and irregular migration. The cost of asylum procedures had become massive; in 1992 it had been estimated to represent 10 times UNHCR's budget. The viability of humane refugee policies seemed to be linked, at least in part, to further refinement and development of concepts and procedures and to the pursuit of cost efficiency. Global and regional cooperation was essential in that respect, as well as in promoting a more comprehensive approach that encompassed both the traditional protection-type activities and various aspects of prevention.

36. In his delegation's view, protective action should comprise four main elements, namely, political conflict prevention, capacity enhancement in the form of training and institution-building, mass information campaigns, and addressing the root causes. Finland welcomed the increasing attention being given by UNHCR to preventive action within its sphere of competence and expected such action to become as important as protection. Since the effectiveness of prevention would normally be enhanced through early warning, his delegation endorsed the suggestion that a focal point for early warning of refugee and refugee-like situations should be established within UNHCR. In cooperation with the Department of Humanitarian Affairs, such an office might begin by gathering data on geographical regions or subregions for potential action.

37. His delegation considered that it would be in the genuine interest of countries in the area as well as those outside it if UNHCR were to focus greater attention on the States of the former Soviet Union and strengthen its presence there. Assistance for capacity-building and related activities should take place in parallel with other forms of preventive action. The preparation of mass information campaigns to be implemented jointly by UNHCR and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) was a good start. Beyond that, however, there was a special need for a comprehensive humanitarian strategy for the area of the former Soviet Union. The formulation of such a strategy called for close cooperation among interested countries and various international organizations.

38. With the approach of winter, humanitarian prospects in the former Yugoslavia remained bleak despite the large-scale relief being provided through dynamic and innovative UNHCR action. His delegation fully agreed with emphasis placed by the High Commissioner on the crucial importance of achieving a political solution to the ongoing conflict.

39. The new geographical dimension should not, however, overshadow the continuing need for UNHCR action in regions more traditionally associated with refugee flows. His delegation noted that remarkable results had been achieved in many parts of Asia and appreciated the efforts being made in Africa, the

continent which received the bulk of Finnish development assistance. The situation in the Horn of Africa remained fragile despite some signs of improvement and a major humanitarian and political effort was needed in Angola to avert another large-scale crisis.

40. The plight of displaced persons in many parts of the world also required attention. UNHCR was only one of the organizations that could make a contribution in that respect and, in so doing, it should take account of the complementarities and expertise of other international bodies. His delegation commended the High Commissioner's approach to the issue and the principles adopted as a basis for drafting the relevant criteria for launching and carrying out operations.

41. While UNHCR had been successful in meeting the enormous managerial challenges facing it, the need for further reforms was self-evident and his delegation looked forward to seeing major progress in that respect during the coming year. The effectiveness of operations could be increased by optimizing cooperation between UNHCR and other international bodies along the lines suggested by the High Commissioner in her opening statement at the 481st meeting. At the same time, UNHCR should continue its efforts to identify new funding sources, since an appreciable increase in contributions by many of the traditional donors could no longer be expected. In particular, an effort should be made to involve more countries in providing assistance to refugees.

42. As far as his own country was concerned, UNHCR was and remained the main channel of multilateral assistance to refugees. More than any other major organization, UNHCR had been able to maintain the support it received from Finland at a high level despite the unprecedented economic crisis affecting his country. He was pleased to announce that his Government had decided to provide UNHCR with an additional allocation of 8.5 million Finnish markkas, thus increasing the current year's contributions by one quarter.

43. In conclusion, he said that impossible burdens should not be imposed on humanitarian organizations. Relief was not a substitute for political solutions; humanitarian action had to be accompanied by parallel measures of peacemaking and post-conflict economic and social rehabilitation. Concerted action was therefore urgently required. Institutional reform remained one of the priority areas of his country's policy in the context of the United Nations.

44. Mr. de RIEDMATTEN (Switzerland) said that his delegation shared the main concerns expressed in the High Commissioner's opening statement. The international community was once more faced with a paradoxical situation where repatriation operations conducted with remarkable success were offset by new large-scale refugee flows. Violations of the principles of international humanitarian law were on the increase; in that connection, he referred to the International Conference on Protection of Victims of War recently convened by his country and attended by nearly 160 States.

45. Since the Executive Committee's last session, the overall situation of refugees worldwide had deteriorated so much that the year's successes had taken place almost unnoticed. Yet in Cambodia, in particular, UNHCR had not

only fulfilled one of its priority tasks, but, by ensuring the repatriation of Khmer refugees before the start of the elections, had also made an appreciable contribution towards the country's democratization. Prompt action by international specialized agencies and non-governmental organizations was now needed to put Cambodia on the road to development, which was the best guarantee of a lasting peace. Quick impact projects (QIPs) would seem to be a promising means of facilitating the transition from humanitarian to development assistance.

46. Major humanitarian operations were increasingly being conducted within a multidisciplinary context that called for an integrated approach. The relationship between humanitarian action and the peace-keeping activities of the United Nations was thus an issue of growing importance for all organizations involved in humanitarian work and, consequently, for UNHCR as well. Recent experience suggested that a clear and consistent distinction had to be maintained between the mandates of peace-keeping forces, on the one hand, and humanitarian agencies, on the other. An organization such as UNHCR had to preserve the greatest possible independence in carrying out its essentially impartial activities. That had been the High Commissioner's position all along and his delegation strongly supported that approach.

47. It also fully endorsed the views expressed by the High Commissioner on the subject of a comprehensive strategy of cooperation with other humanitarian organizations, whether within the United Nations system or outside it, such as ICRC and non-governmental organizations.

48. In commending the quality of the High Commissioner's note on international protection (A/AC.96/815), he welcomed the information campaigns conducted in certain countries of origin in collaboration with IOM as a means of dealing with irregular migration. The proposals relating to the protection of the internally displaced appeared to be both realistic and flexible. UNHCR's activities in that field were designed to perform a preventive function and to avoid discrimination between displaced persons, on the one hand, and refugees, on the other. At the same time, his delegation supported the High Commissioner wish to pursue its activities on behalf of displaced persons without seeking an extension of her mandate and, like other delegations, considered that discussion of that crucial issue should continue in the Subcommittee of the Whole on International Protection.

49. Like other industrialized countries, Switzerland had been compelled to adopt a policy of greater firmness in matters of asylum so as to ensure the protection of genuine asylum-seekers. In so doing, his country intended to fulfil its obligations towards persecuted persons under the 1951 Convention, one of the essential points of which was the principle of non-refoulement.

50. The worsening of the refugee situation worldwide and the proliferation of regional conflicts meant that funds might be less readily forthcoming than hitherto and that an order of priorities might have to be established. Although, like many other donor countries, Switzerland was prepared to maintain its level of support and to place additional funds at UNHCR's disposal, present financial difficulties might stand in the way of the realization of those good intentions. His country would do its best to achieve a level of contributions in 1994 comparable to that for the current

year. It also continued to be willing to place experts of the Swiss Disaster Relief Corps at UNHCR's disposal, as it had done under the shelter programme for the former Yugoslavia. That type of operational cooperation would be strengthened in future.

51. Switzerland had regularly encouraged all efforts by UNHCR designed to improve programme management and efficiency. In that spirit, it supported the idea of establishing an internal inspection unit, the precise modalities of which were still to be defined by the Subcommittee on Administrative and Financial Matters.

52. In conclusion, he reiterated his delegation's admiration and esteem for the High Commissioner personally and for all UNHCR officials working so selflessly and courageously to defend humanitarian principles.

53. Mrs. BAUTISTA (Philippines) joined previous speakers in paying a tribute to the High Commissioner and to all UNHCR officials, both men and women, who had risked or lost their lives in discharging UNHCR's mandate in situations of conflict and danger. The security of UNHCR staff should be a matter of particular concern to all members of the Executive Committee.

54. Her delegation endorsed the High Commissioner's call for continued commitment, particularly among countries of asylum and donor countries, to the universal right of refuge and the rights of refugees. The High Commissioner was to be congratulated on her initiatives in finding preventive solutions for refugees and her activities on behalf of internally displaced populations. In many cases, the root causes of refugee problems were the lack of sustainable economic development and human rights violations. Her delegation shared the hope that the international community would intensify its efforts to assist developing countries in the pursuit of well-being and progress for their people.

55. In her delegation's view, UNHCR had to be very clear in the pursuit of its primary function of protection, its preventive and development functions being, of necessity, performed in conjunction with Governments, the relevant governmental and nongovernmental organizations and other United Nations agencies. The Office's continued collaborative efforts with those organizations and with Governments and its pursuit of cooperation with non-governmental organizations as "partners in action" showed that UNHCR shared that view. Her delegation welcomed the distinction drawn by the High Commissioner in defining criteria for involvement in the case of internally displaced persons, namely, that primary responsibility was assumed only when the activities in question were directly linked with UNHCR-mandated functions, UNHCR's role being secondary if that was not the case. UNHCR's capacity to respond to the needs of internally displaced persons was clearly limited by its mandate and the solution was not to be sought in extending the mandate, but in close collaboration with responsible agencies and authorities.

56. Her delegation had noted with particular interest that progress had been made during the past year in meeting the needs of refugee women and children, who not only made up the bulk of the refugee population, but were also the groups most vulnerable to abuse and exploitation even after reaching the relative security of refugee camps. Sexual violence against women in times of

conflict might be nothing new, but the extent to which sexual abuse had been systematically resorted to and the frequency of its occurrence were appalling. When such cases included abuse of female children, they became unbearably odious. The Philippines strongly supported continued efforts to find solutions designed to protect refugee women from sexual violence and welcomed the revised guidelines on refugee children.

57. As an Asian country, the Philippines was particularly happy to note that UNHCR activities in the Asian region were nearing completion. That should not, however, be taken to mean that the region's refugees problems were actually over. In cooperation with the countries concerned, UNHCR should try to solve the problems of those who had fled conflict areas and had received asylum, but did not want to become refugees under the terms of the 1951 Convention. As the screening process for all countries in the region was to be completed by mid-1994 at the latest, her delegation noted with concern that only persons denied refugee status would remain in camps in 1994. The question of finding solutions for those cases should be placed high on the agenda of the Steering Committee of the Comprehensive Plan of Action (CPA).

58. Many countries of first and temporary asylum would be interested to see how the problem of those who were neither resettled nor voluntarily repatriated was solved. The problem was particularly acute in first-asylum countries where local integration was not a viable option. The Philippines looked forward to discussions with UNHCR with a view to finding solutions that would be in the best interests of both the persons and the Governments concerned. Pending such discussions, she associated herself with the representative of Thailand in urging that the voluntary repatriation programme be pursued with determined effort as being vital to the solution of the refugee problem in SouthEast Asia and in expressing the hope that the formal meeting of the CPA Steering Committee would provide an opportunity for all parties to reach a speedy and durable solution to the problem of Indo-Chinese asylum-seekers.

59. In conclusion, she reiterated her Government's support for UNHCR's activities and the initiatives of the High Commissioner in the performance of her difficult tasks and thanked donor countries and intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations for their cooperation in caring for asylum-seekers in the Philippines.

60. Mr. ELKHATIM (Sudan) recalled that, despite its meagre resources, his country had shouldered the enormous burden of hosting more than 1 million refugees in the past three decades. Of late, Sudan, together with all other parties concerned, had been looking forward to an orderly voluntary repatriation operation. Unfortunately, that opportunity had not materialized and Sudan was continuing to discharge its responsibilities towards its refugee population on behalf of the international community.

61. The impact of refugees on all aspects of life was constantly increasing in Sudan, while adherence to the principle of international burden-sharing, which should remain the governing principle in dealing with all refugee situations, was decreasing alarmingly there. His Government could not hide its disappointment that the ambition of massive, orderly and effective voluntary repatriation in the Horn of Africa had not been fulfilled. The

winds of change that had created favourable conditions for the durable solution that voluntary repatriation represented were still not being taken advantage of by the international community.

62. The refugee case load in Sudan remained unchanged. The dream of making 1992 the Year of Voluntary Repatriation had not been realized and 1994 was approaching without any positive signs that it would come about. Sudan continued to host over 500,000 Eritrean refugees and over 300,000 Ethiopian refugees, who looked forward to voluntarily returning to their homes. Only recently, an exceptional return of approximately 13,000 Ethiopian refugees had taken place in very special circumstances and without any assistance from the international community. That experience had been thoroughly evaluated at a workshop organized in Khartoum on 17 and 18 September 1993, with participants from the Ethiopian Government, UNHCR and NGOs. The conclusions drawn, which interested delegations were invited to examine, clearly underscored the vital importance of assisting returnees in order to avoid creating other emergencies requiring long-term and complex solutions. Consequently, his Government called on the Executive Committee to place the question of the voluntary repatriation of the Ethiopian and Eritrean refugees at the top of its agenda and urged the international community to support the Eritrean plan of voluntary repatriation, which had been fully considered by the Department of Humanitarian Affairs in July 1993. The international community needed to act expeditiously in support of the plan, particularly by rebuilding essential parts of the infrastructure at the receiving end. His Government supported the reintegration programmes for receiving areas in Ethiopia.

63. Although the scheme of voluntary repatriation for Eritrean and Ethiopian refugees had not yet been implemented, a number of inaccurate media reports on a supposedly voluntary return from Sudan to both Eritrea and Ethiopia had been published. In most cases, the reports were totally unrealistic, but they were sometimes quoted in public information releases, leading to an erroneous impression that such repatriation was taking place on a considerable scale. Consequently, the budgetary allocations for the assistance programme to refugees in Sudan were dwindling and cuts had sometimes been made in very vital areas and services. The end result would be fewer and fewer resources for the same case load. His Government therefore called on UNHCR to engage with it in a serious study of the situation in order to avoid any negative repercussions.

64. Sudan had always taken pride in its application of purely humanitarian principles for dealing with matters relating to refugees. It would, of course, continue to do so and it hoped that others would refrain from injecting political factors into the humanitarian setting. Failure to exclude such extraneous factors would only cause the refugees to suffer, something that everyone should avoid. Effective sources of assistance to refugees were either drying up or being drastically reduced; for example, some NGOs were withdrawing from vital areas, such as health, the environment and self-help in agriculture for refugees, basing their decisions on non-humanitarian grounds despite the Sudanese Government's continued cooperation.

65. Two years previously, his Government had endorsed the agreement reached with WFP and the time had now come to assess its effectiveness in providing food for refugees. According to his Government's understanding, WFP's role was limited to the delivery of food at ports, national mechanisms being responsible for distribution and other stages. In practice, however, WFP had been trying to replace the national mechanisms, while UNHCR had stood on the sidelines. His Government, confident that WFP and UNHCR would spare no effort to cooperate in improving the effectiveness of food deliveries to the refugees, therefore called once again for an urgent reassessment of the arrangement.

66. His delegation was pleased to note UNHCR's improved performance in the field. It congratulated the High Commissioner and all her staff on the efforts they had been making and earnestly hoped that such improvements would continue. It also congratulated the High Commissioner on the functioning of the Office of the Senior Coordinator for Environmental Affairs, who had recently visited Sudan on a mission relating to the environment and refugees. His Government expected that some concrete action would follow as a result of that visit. Needless to say, the negative impact on the environment of refugees in the areas that hosted them in Sudan called for action and appropriate remedies, since the environment was indivisible and knew no political or geographical boundaries.

67. Just as Sudan was granting protection to refugees from neighbouring countries, there were also Sudanese refugees in the territories of some of its neighbours, totalling around 250,000. His Government regretted to report that most of those refugees were deprived of the necessary protection and assistance. It was extremely concerned about the well-being of thousands of unaccompanied refugee minors in Kenya, who were being exploited by the rebel movement for military purposes. His Government had made very positive efforts to protect those children, paving the way for their voluntary return to Sudan. Unfortunately, however, it had met with considerable obstacles. It reiterated its call to all concerned to cooperate in overcoming those obstacles and would leave no stone unturned in its legitimate attempts to protect its citizens in accordance with the principles of international law. It also reiterated its commitment to all international instruments governing refugee issues and would continue to accord protection and care to refugees in Sudan until they had voluntarily returned to their homelands.

68. Mgr. TABET (Holy See) congratulated the secretariat on the quality of the documentation produced and the High Commissioner and her staff on their courageous devotion to the cause of refugees and said that, through a vast network of organizations and groups taking an active interest in the fate of refugees and displaced persons, the Roman Catholic Church was trying to make a contribution motivated by its faith in the dignity of every individual and by its desire to promote solidarity within the entire human family, particularly in respect of those who suffered, so as to ensure respect for their rights. Guidelines for assistance to refugees had already been laid down in 1992 in a Holy See document that was intended to be a Church charter for the protection of those who, for various reasons, were obliged to seek refuge abroad.

69. The analyses and observations contained in the Note on International Protection (A/AC.96/815) deserved the Executive Committee's full attention. They showed that the current world situation involved enormous potential dangers which might undo international solidarity and make the fate of refugees and displaced persons even more precarious. The extent of population movements within and between countries and the increase in the number of forced exiles were causing fear and antagonism and generating defensive reactions. Accordingly, the Holy See's document stressed that refugees were a challenge to the international community. It was gratifying to note that the Note on International Protection (A/AC.96/815) echoed the call to the conscience of individuals and States to unite and combine their resources with a view to finding a prompt response proportionate to the dimensions of the problem. That response must necessarily entail a sharing of the burden of assistance to refugees, since only a small percentage of them sought or obtained asylum in countries outside their own region of origin. States must therefore strengthen their support for UNHCR so that it could fulfil its mandate.

70. Solidarity would be achieved by an improved exchange of information on refugee issues and also by the participation of all available services, including those of voluntary agencies. Coordination was necessary in order to arrive at a better evaluation of difficult situations and to channel aid more effectively. However, it was particularly important to create a favourable climate capable of mitigating or preventing negative xenophobic reactions and of educating peoples in understanding rather than rejection.

71. In order to cope with the vast population movements taking place, the international community was invited to make use of the most effective prevention mechanisms in order to achieve security for individuals and development for countries. Such action necessarily entailed respect for human rights, a democratic form of government, greater attention to economic and ecological balances and the appropriate and better targeted use of development aid. In that connection, the commitment of the United Nations, and of UNHCR in particular, to respect for human rights and the rights of minorities, as well as its "preventive diplomacy" role, must be encouraged. The protection of displaced persons inside their own country was an essential element in such prevention and the Holy See hoped that the international community would continue to consider the fate of such persons and to fill the serious gaps in the law relating to their protection.

72. It should nevertheless be borne in mind, as the Note on International Protection rightly indicated, that the institution of asylum and the principle of non-refoulement must be supported and strengthened, since they were currently in danger of being infringed by countries which tended to adopt increasingly selective and dissuasive asylum policies in seeking to protect themselves to the detriment of refugees. In many of its conclusions, the Executive Committee had formulated guidelines to help States to treat asylum-seekers in accordance with the 1951 Convention and other international instruments relating to refugees and human rights. Such instruments affirmed, in particular, that every country was responsible for respecting and enforcing respect for the rights of refugees in the same way that it guaranteed the rights of its own citizens.

73. Even if States were responsible for protecting their borders and were engaged in making a clearer classification of migratory groups, they could not close their borders to genuine refugees, send them away without any guarantee that they would be accepted in a third country or send them to a country where discriminatory action might be taken against them or their integrity might be seriously violated. Furthermore, States and international agencies must give the necessary attention to the refugee's family and work for family reunification. As was pointed out in international instruments relating to refugees, the principle of family unity should always be taken into account in refugee programmes.

74. Massive population inflows had led UNHCR to resort to the concept of "temporary protection". It was, however, important that, during the "temporary protection" period, refugees should be able to enjoy decent living conditions, particularly a family life, a job and the possibility of educating their children. The presence of "temporary" refugees should always prompt the international community to consider solutions that would make it possible for them to be voluntarily repatriated. In that connection, the Holy See welcomed the repatriation operations carried out in the past few months under the auspices of UNHCR.

75. The Holy See also welcomed the fact that the Subcommittee of the Whole on International Protection was concerning itself with the security of refugees by giving special attention to women and children, whom recent experience had shown to be the first victims of conflicts and, possibly, of the most ignoble crimes. In that connection, the thousands of mines laid represented a terrible danger for the lives of innocent people and the Holy See associated itself with all those who condemned the persons who had laid the mines or manufactured them and supported all the steps being taken to destroy them or prevent their activation.

76. The human solidarity displayed by every community which hosted refugees and by the activities of national and international organizations which took care of them or tried to eliminate the causes leading to their exile was an effective contribution to peace. It was a commitment from which the international community could not stand aloof and the Holy See and the Roman Catholic Church were determined to play an active role in it.

77. Mr. LARSEN (Denmark), endorsing the statement made by the representative of Belgium on behalf of the European Community and its member States at the 481st meeting, said that his Government greatly appreciated the outstanding leadership provided by the High Commissioner, Mrs. Ogata, and looked forward to her re-election.

78. The current session of the Executive Committee was taking place in an international situation which had presented UNHCR with enormous challenges. Emergencies requiring it to take comprehensive and speedy action had occurred with saddening repetitiveness over the past year. In a number of countries in which UNHCR was operating, the environment was becoming increasingly hostile and risky, characterized by violations of international humanitarian law, interference in the implementation of humanitarian assistance programmes and deliberate attacks on humanitarian field staff in areas of conflict or war, of which the number of UNHCR staff members who had been killed or wounded was a

tragic reminder. In that connection, he expressed Denmark's profound admiration for UNHCR's field staff, who continued to perform their duties despite the personal risk involved. His Government fully supported further international efforts to guarantee the safety and protection of United Nations personnel operating in areas of armed conflict.

79. In her opening statement, the High Commissioner had described in very clear and precise terms the financial strains which the increased level of activity was placing on UNHCR, whose global budget, for the second consecutive year, had surpassed the US$ 1 billion mark. UNHCR had mastered the challenges with great determination and Denmark urged the donor community to react with the same determination in responding to its funding needs. An adequate response could be brought about only by a substantial widening of the circle of traditional donors and by ensuring fairer burden-sharing among them. There was still a long way to go before that would be achieved. UNHCR had made a concentrated effort to increase the donor base, especially by bringing in new donor countries and by focusing on resource mobilization in the private sector. Denmark supported those efforts and urged Governments and prospective non-governmental donors to respond positively.

80. Furthermore, an adequate division of labour reflecting the comparative advantages of individual organizations and agencies and, in particular, close and well-coordinated cooperation and partnership with other agencies and non-governmental organizations were of the utmost importance, especially in a period when UNHCR's own resources were under severe strain. The Partnership in Action programme (PARINAC) (A/AC.96/INF.177) was a very promising step in the direction of more clearly defined and efficient cooperation with UNHCR's partners in the implementation of assistance programmes.

81. Strong inter-agency cooperation was also important both in emergencies and in the search for durable solutions. Denmark would like to see the development of a genuine partnership in action comprising not only the traditional agencies and organizations active in the field of humanitarian assistance, but also national and multilateral development agencies, including the international financial institutions, with a view to integrating humanitarian assistance with efforts to resolve the underlying causes of crisis and conflict. Those institutions had an important role to play both in preventing refugee situations and in the search for durable solutions, not least in facilitating voluntary repatriation by stimulating rehabilitation, economic growth and the creation of employment opportunities in the countries concerned.

82. In her opening statement, the High Commissioner had also dealt with the question of internally displaced persons and with how and to what extent UNHCR should be involved in that problem. Denmark welcomed the pragmatic line suggested by the High Commissioner and looked forward to further discussions, both in the Executive Committee and in other relevant United Nations bodies, in order to develop a comprehensive and adequate response to the immense and ever more demanding problem of the internally displaced.

83. A further element of paramount importance to UNHCR's ability to fulfil its mandate was the efficient management of scarce resources. At a time when donor countries, including Denmark, were strongly emphasizing the need for accountability and efficient, transparent and cost-conscious management within the United Nations system, his Government noted with satisfaction the impressive record that UNHCR had achieved with regard to programme management under the leadership of Mrs. Ogata. His Government encouraged and supported every step that the High Commissioner might take in order to strengthen further the efficient management of UNHCR, including her proposal to establish a post of inspector of operational activities and initiatives in favour of women and children.

84. The situation in the former Yugoslavia clearly demonstrated the need for variable approaches. In the area of conflict, Denmark was actively engaged, both financially and with manpower, in providing the necessary humanitarian assistance to the victims. With the oncoming winter, assistance would be of crucial importance. Furthermore, Denmark and other countries had introduced the concept of temporary protection, with a new law now being implemented for the more than 12,000 Bosnians who had so far sought refuge in Denmark or who had been invited to enter the country. However, that concept should not replace asylum within the meaning of the 1951 Convention and Denmark's national legislation. Temporary protection provided possibilities for suspending the ordinary asylum procedure for a fixed period and should offer the affected persons education and a process of reconciliation in preparation for their eventual return to their country and participation in its reconstruction.

85. He also thanked UNHCR for the excellent cooperation between it and the office recently established in Zagreb by the Danish Ministry of the Interior to deal with asylum and protection issues. The office had already proved to be a successful innovation, ensuring that persons in need of immediate protection obtained it outside the area of conflict as expeditiously as possible. The office was paying particular attention to urgent cases, including medical evacuations, and the on-the-spot presence had helped to speed up the protection process considerably.

86. He was glad to announce that, in response to the High Commissioner's appeal, Denmark would, in the near future and subject to approval by the Danish Parliament, make several new contributions to UNHCR. The amount which the Government had in mind was approximately US$ 8 million the major part of which would be provided for UNHCR's General Programmes. Total Danish contributions to UNHCR in 1993 would thus be brought to the record level of 1992, which had been equivalent to US$ 35 million. Those contributions did not include Danish assistance through the European Community or a number of contributions to NGOs which implemented refugee programmes in close cooperation with UNHCR. In any case, Denmark would continue to provide strong support - political, diplomatic and financial - to UNHCR's efforts to protect and assist the world's refugees.

87. Mr. de COURTEN (International Committee of the Red Cross) said that, with the end of an essentially bipolar world, the international community had entered into a new phase characterized by many hopes and widespread turmoil. The latter had forced ICRC to strengthen its presence in many countries where

conflicts were raging. Mainly of an internal nature, those conflicts originated in inter-ethnic or religious struggles and were marked by a fanaticism whose principal victims were civilians. Massive violations of human rights were leading to equally massive displacements of population and were creating waves of refugees. According to the United Nations, there were now 19 million refugees and 25 million internally displaced persons in the world.

88. It was in that context that UNHCR and ICRC found themselves working side by side in situations such as those in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Somalia, Mozambique, Pakistan, Cambodia, Tajikistan and Sudan. The task was so enormous that the coordination of work in order to avoid overlapping and gaps was even more essential than before.

89. The practical problems encountered in the field, particularly that of security - both institutions had unfortunately reported victims among their ranks - had led them to coordinate their approaches. Thus, the preservation of the apolitical and impartial nature of humanitarian activities was at the heart of their shared concerns. The absence of a specific humanitarian area, perceived as such and respected by the conflicting parties, would make it impossible for ICRC and UNHCR to provide the protection and assistance needed by victims and therefore to fulfil the mandates which the international community had entrusted to them. In particular, in conflicts having a major humanitarian dimension, there was a danger of regarding humanitarian action as just another form of political action or, worse still, as an alibi for States not to shoulder their responsibilities at the political level. As stated in the UNHCR Note on International Protection "Humanitarian action alone clearly cannot end conflict or prevent the resultant displacement, particularly where displacement is an objective of warfare and of systematic human rights abuses" (A/AC.96/825, para. 54).

90. In the field, the expanded role of peace-keeping forces was being confused with that of humanitarian agencies. In situations of conflict, it would be risky to think that the parties would all regard United Nations military contingents as neutral. For United Nations humanitarian agencies, the problem was therefore one of being viewed as neutral by all the combatants in order to be able to help all the victims in an impartial manner. A clear-cut distinction thus had to be made between the role of States in peace-keeping operations and that of neutral and impartial humanitarian organizations. ICRC, for its part, wanted to continue acting totally independently, guided solely by the interest of all the victims in the conflict. In that connection, it based itself on the universally accepted provisions of the 1949 Geneva Conventions, article 3 of which related to non-international armed conflict, and Additional Protocol II of 1977, which strengthened the legal protection of civilians against the effects of hostilities and abuses of power.

91. If international humanitarian law had actually been applied, the problem of refugees and displaced persons in cases of armed conflict would not have assumed the proportions that were now to be deplored. The rules of existing

international humanitarian law therefore had to be reaffirmed and States which had not yet done so had to be invited to ratify the two Additional Protocols of 1977 and to abide by their provisions in all existing conflicts. States would thus be engaging in prevention.

92. That had been the aim of the International Conference for the Protection of War Victims, which had been held in Geneva in August 1993 at the invitation of the Swiss Government. Its final declaration, which had been adopted by consensus, marked the refusal to accept violations of fundamental human rights and called for the improved coordination of emergency humanitarian activities, increased support for humanitarian agencies and access to areas of conflict. It also called on States to enforce international humanitarian law and to take firm measures against countries responsible for violations of that law.

93. Mr. ŽUŽUL (Observer for Croatia), referring to the situation in the former Yugoslavia, said that the suffering of millions of war victims and the aggression committed against Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina called for sustained action by the international community. The situation required, first and foremost, urgent political and peaceful solutions which would not sanction the acquisition of territories by force and called for massive international assistance to help the victims to survive the winter and begin a normal life in the devastated and ethnically cleansed areas in Croatia.

94. The commitment of the people and authorities of Croatia to help the refugees and displaced persons in their territory had been demonstrated when Croatia, itself continuously exposed to brutal aggression, had received hundreds of thousands of refugees from Bosnia and Herzegovina, most of them Muslims. His country had demonstrated its commitment by sheltering some 246,000 displaced persons from the occupied areas of Croatia and an additional 276,000 refugees from Bosnia and Herzegovina, who accounted for 12.5 per cent of the population of the free part of Croatia. His country encouraged others to act in the same spirit and to respect the agreements they had signed. That applied particularly to the Muslim side, which still held thousands of Croats hostage in central Bosnia. In addition, over 400,000 refugees and displaced persons were being cared for in private homes, and that was a tremendous burden for the Croatian population, economy and society. Croatia's monthly expenses for that purpose amounted to approximately US$ 62 million, a figure that exceeded the total financial aid it had received over the past two years.

95. It was obvious that assistance from many countries, either bilaterally or through international organizations, was rapidly decreasing. In the case of Croatia, such assistance met only 30 per cent of its requirements, compared with 60 per cent in 1992. Croatia therefore associated itself with the countries which had expressed alarm and disappointment about the prospects for the approaching third winter period.

96. Not a single person had returned to ethnically cleansed areas in Croatia, despite the fact that that was one of the most important objectives of the Vance plan, for whose implementation UNPROFOR was responsible. His Government sincerely hoped that, under the new UNPROFOR mandate, the implementation process would finally begin and it would do its utmost in that regard.

97. He reiterated his Government's readiness to continue searching for a peaceful solution to the crisis in Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina on the basis of the relevant decisions of the Security Council and the London Conference. In that process, his Government would continue to act constructively, but remained determined to defend Croatia's territorial integrity.

98. The situation with regard to refugees and displaced persons remained critical and his country therefore drew the attention of the international community to the possibility of massive population movements across the borders of Croatia.

99. The crisis in the territory of the former Yugoslavia was the most difficult one in the world today. International humanitarian efforts were beginning to show signs of reduced financial commitment and, if the major donors did not make new pledges, thousands of refugees would be in danger. The Executive Committee should therefore make a strong appeal to the international community and the public at large.

100. Mr. MACRIS (Observer for Cyprus) said that the comprehensive strategy planned by UNHCR in order to meet new and ongoing emergencies enjoyed his Government's support. Cyprus, which was experiencing the forcible uprooting of one third of its population by the occupying Power, was working in close cooperation with UNHCR for the fulfilment of its noble task. It was well-known that his Government had made good use of the assistance allocated to Cyprus, aimed at improving the general living conditions of the displaced persons and at carrying out bi-communal projects with a view to improving mutual trust and consolidating the confidence-building process. In that connection, he expressed his country's gratitude to the United States Government for its continuous interest and the generous assistance it channelled to the people of Cyprus through UNHCR.

101. His delegation fully endorsed the view that the best solution to the refugee problem was repatriation under conditions of safety. It therefore called on Governments to create opportunities that would allow refugees to exercise their right to return to their homes. If United Nations resolutions calling for the return of all refugees to their homes in safety and for the restoration of and respect for the human rights and fundamental freedoms of all Cypriots had been implemented, the refugee problem in Cyprus would have been solved long ago. The Cyprus problem must be solved through peaceful processes on the basis of United Nations resolutions and indisputable principles which should safeguard democracy and protect human rights, as well as the right to freedom of movement and settlement and the right to property.

102. In conclusion, he thanked UNHCR and all those involved in activities in Cyprus and assured the Executive Committee that his country would continue to cooperate with and support UNHCR's efforts to find solutions to the refugee problem.

103. Mr. MORVAY (Hungary) said that 1993 could be regarded as a year of vast humanitarian challenges, especially in Africa and Europe, demanding emergency responses. He expressed his Government's full support for the High Commissioner's concept of preventive strategy based on the existence of links between peacemaking, peace-keeping and humanitarian action.

104. As a front-line country, Hungary had been the first to experience the effects of the southern Slav crisis. From the summer of 1991 to the end of August 1993, 66,559 refugees and displaced persons had fled to Hungary.

105. In order to establish a reliable registration system, a new identification card had been issued for them by the Hungarian authorities. As a result, some 8,000 displaced persons were living in Hungary and approximately 3,200 were being accommodated in permanent reception centres and temporary shelters. There were also 30,000 de facto refugees, mainly ethnic Hungarians from Romania, living in Hungary and their integration into his country's society had advanced remarkably.

106. The continuing southern Slav crisis was the result of problems relating to the accommodation of and support for displaced persons. Special projects had to be designed for that purpose and new infrastructural facilities had to be established.

107. From 1 January 1992 to 30 September 1993, infrastructure and operational costs at the five largest reception centres and temporary shelters had amounted to Ft 884 million. During the same period, the accommodation of refugees had required an additional Ft 770 million. All those expenses had been met by the Refugee Support Fund of Hungary with a budget of Ft 1 billion for 1992 and 1993, respectively. UNHCR's financial support for refugees and displaced persons from the former Yugoslavia had amounted to Ft 708 billion in 1992. His Government had recently been informed that the allocation for 1993 might be substantially reduced at a time when new refugees could be expected to arrive in Hungary from the former Yugoslavia, particularly from Voivodina, where ethnic Hungarians were under constant threat. Nationals of other countries were also expected to seek refuge in Hungary owing to economic pressure, poverty and hopelessness.

108. Although it was experiencing serious financial and economic difficulties compounded by the process of change, his country had left its borders open to those fleeing persecution. The Hungarian Government had not only appreciated the financial assistance it received from the international community, but had endeavoured to contribute in kind to UNHCR relief programmes. His country found itself confronted with economic and financial losses that were directly attributable to the effects of the strict implementation of sanctions imposed by the Security Council on the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro). Those losses, which were constantly growing, had reached US$ 1 billion. Under those circumstances, his people relied to a greater extent to the solidarity of the international community. It sincerely hoped that the planned cuts in the project designed to provide supplementary assistance for its efforts to care for refugees in Hungary would not be made necessary by a financial shortfall in the Special Operation for the Former Yugoslavia.

109. Hungary was making the necessary preparations for expected new emergency situations. It was sparing no effort to create a national legal framework corresponding to accepted international standards. In that regard, the Hungarian Parliament had adopted an act on citizenship in March 1993 and another on aliens in September 1993 and proposals on asylum law would be submitted to the Government soon. All those developments would speed up the withdrawal of the geographical reservations Hungary had made to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and the 1967 Protocol in 1989. By Government decree, the new Office of Refugee and Migration Affairs had been established in the spring of 1993.

110. The newly introduced restrictions in some European countries whereby asylum-seekers were treated according to their country of origin rather than as individual cases were matters of concern to Hungary's Government and population.

111. Hungary had achieved positive results through its long cooperation with UNHCR. Ongoing UNHCR projects in Hungary had greatly assisted his Government and the responsible authorities in tackling the refugee problem in accordance with international standards. The computerized registration system provided by UNHCR had become an indispensable tool for the Office of Refugee and Migration Affairs. Further development of UNHCR databases and the earliest possible on-line access to it would be of vital importance for the Hungarian authorities in conducting eligibility determination on the basis of sound country-of-origin information.

112. Mr. GOAGOSEB (Namibia) said that the international community, UNHCR and other relevant humanitarian agencies were faced with the momentous task of providing effective and immediate assistance to the victims of internal conflicts and war. Humanitarian assistance was but one aspect of the needs required by civilians. The international community was called upon to interact with a strong political will on the basis of an unbiased attitude so as to ensure durable peace and stability in conflict situations.

113. In 1992, the Executive Committee had discussed the possibilities for peace in Angola and expressed the hope that positive developments prevailing at that time would pave the way for the refugees to return to their own country, but, unfortunately, the war continued in Angola. Aware of the financial dilemma facing the international community, he nevertheless considered it his duty to state that Angola was being seriously neglected. According to available statistics, over 1,000 human beings died in Angola everyday and more than 2 million people were on the brink of starvation.

114. As the immediate southern neighbour of Angola, Namibia experienced a daily influx of refugees forced to leave their country. While its resources had been stretched to the limits, Namibia would not fail in its duty to provide a safe haven for those seeking refuge.

115. His delegation viewed the volatile situation in South Africa with great concern. Although a date had been set for the first-ever non-racial democratic election, the ongoing violence did not help to create the necessary

stable environment. The possibility of a refugee influx from South Africa could therefore not be ruled out entirely. If that became a reality, Namibia would inevitably call on the international community for assistance.

116. The ongoing conflict in Somalia required not only peace-keeping and humanitarian assistance, but also made it necessary for UNHCR's mandate to be expanded to include internally displaced persons.

117. Unforeseen delays in the preparation of internal legislation had not yet made it possible for his Government to ratify the international instruments concerning refugees, but a positive step had been taken in that direction. The Cabinet of the Government of the Republic had approved Namibia's accession and the Parliament of the Republic was to give its final approval.

118. As a young nation, Namibia appealed to the international community to help it meet the needs of future asylum-seekers and would-be refugees. It pledged its support and cooperation with UNHCR to combat the refugee problem.

The meeting rose at 12.50 p.m.